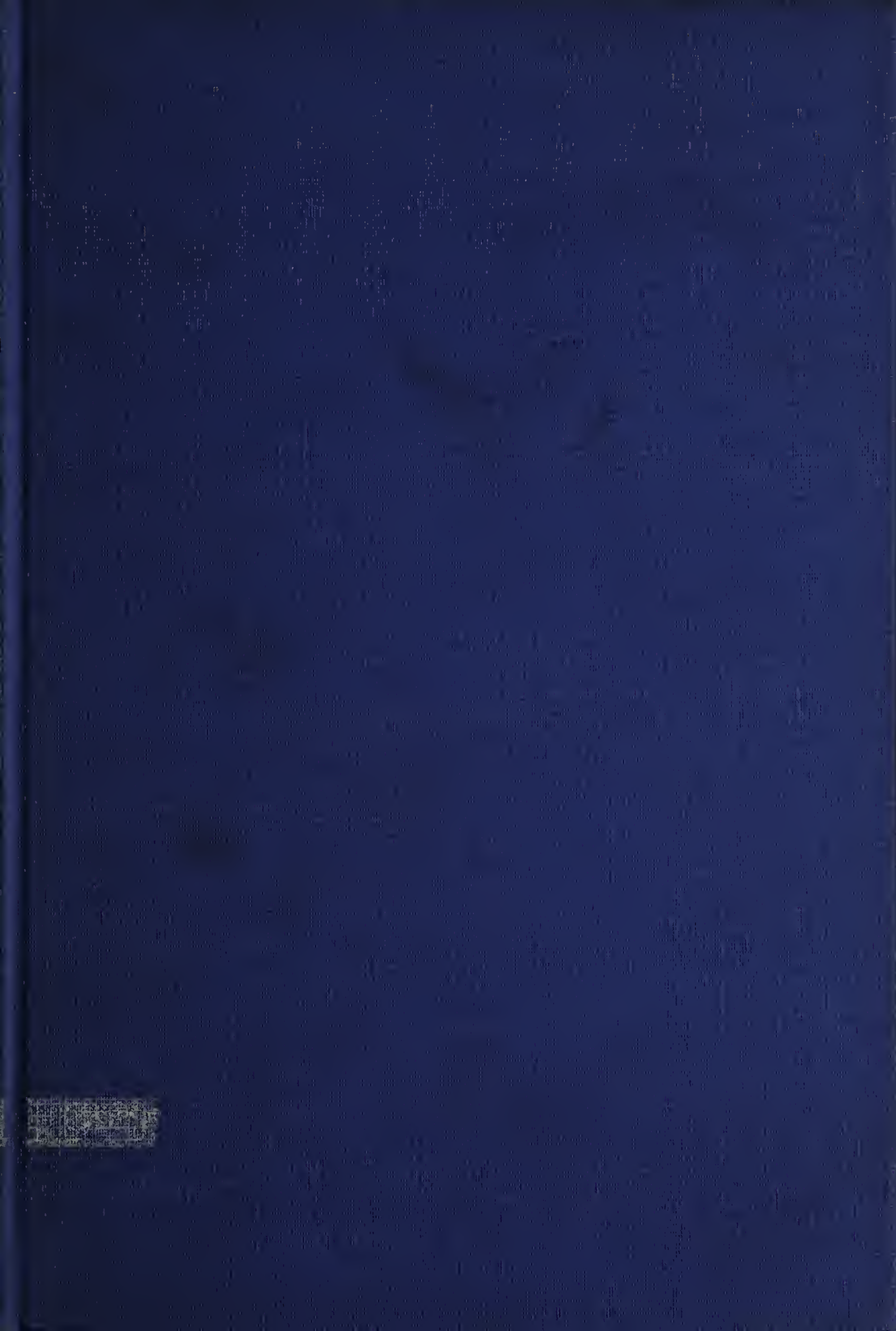




The Biography of Nobody

AL SCHMID MARINE. By Roger Butterfield. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 1944. 142 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by FLETCHER PRATT

MR. BUTTERFIELD has attempted one of the most difficult feats in all literature—the biography of nobody; rarely attempted except in fiction and still more rarely successful even with that assistance. Al Schmid was a marine who fought heroically (he himself spits at the sound of the last word) at the battle of the Tenaru, was almost completely blinded, and received a Navy Cross. But since then there have been Attu and Kwajalein and Tarawa, with many others still to come, so that his personal part in the war will look very small by the time the lights go on again. Very small; for after all he was in action and shooting at the enemy for only a part of one night before he was hauled out by the heels.

Since then he has done nothing but marry the girl he was going to marry when the news of Pearl Harbor came over the radio. Before that he did nothing but the aimless floating from job to job of the average young American brought up at the fringe of city and country who finds school too much trouble after he has turned fifteen. It is unlikely that he will trouble history further. Only in fiction could one reasonably ask that the curtain be lifted on the outcome of that marriage.

He is, in fact, the typical case of the boy who went to war because there was a war, the young American who was fighting on Guadalcanal for blueberry pie. If his story has any importance it is because his case is typical. Mr. Butterfield has done his best to present us with all the evidence for making our own estimates in this typical case and it is a fairly good best. It is also a brief best; we could have done with a little more about Al Schmid's early days, the kind of home he lived in, and the wallpaper.

One also has the sense that the narrative has been cleaned up a good deal. But this is probably due to the fact that the biographer has no source but the subject himself for all these early passages. When the more difficult spot is reached where it is necessary to consider Al Schmid's relations with his Ruth (whose letters he returned because he did not wish her to be tied to a man 95 per cent blind) the narrative becomes considerably more adult and by this token more interesting.

In fact, this is the center of the really important part of the book, with its suggestion that the most current discussion of post-war problems is being conducted in a vacuum, since the greatest of all the post-war problems is the reintegration into society of men who have radically changed since leaving it. Al Schmid has achieved his reintegration—for the time being. But will they all?

APRIL 1, 1944



Al Schmid

MARINE





Life Photo by Alfred Eisenstaedt

Al Schmid and Ruth Hartley on the front porch at Jim Merchant's Tulip Street house in Philadelphia. Al lived here before he joined the Marines.

Al Schmid

MARINE



By ROGER BUTTERFIELD

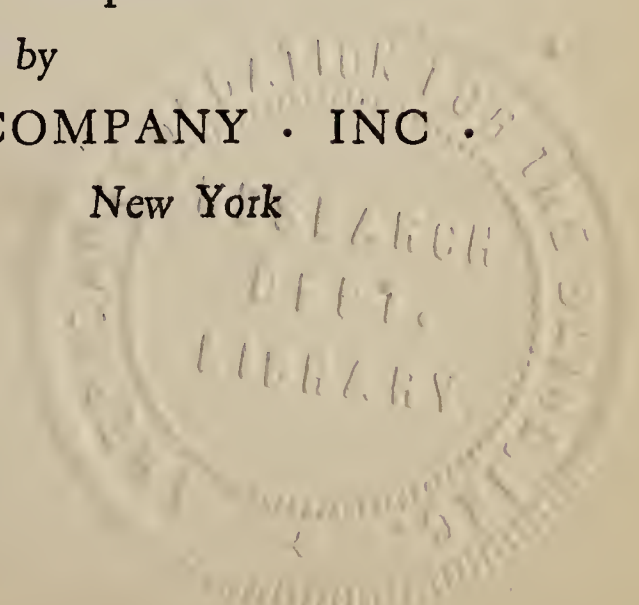
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First Edition

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PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FOR THE PUBLISHERS BY THE NORWOOD PRESS

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO

Private Johnny Rivers

OF THE FIRST REGIMENT, UNITED STATES MARINES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I AM grateful to Brigadier General Robert L. Denig, USMC, and to Captain J. H. Breiel, USMCR, and Captain Everett C. Callow, USMCR, for their constant interest and helpfulness during the preparation of this book. The same thanks go to First Sergeant Max Slepín, Sergeant Frank Harrington, and a lot of other Marines.

I am also especially grateful to *Life* for the use of photographs which appear as illustrations.

R. B.

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NOTE TO THE READER

This is the story of one Marine, a private in the fighting on Guadalcanal, who killed his share of Japs, was promoted and decorated for bravery, lost his eyesight when an enemy grenade blew up in his face, and then fought another battle back to sanity, health and happiness. It is set down just as he told it, using his own words, phrases and descriptions, even when they are not quoted—this is Al's book. He told me in one of our first interviews that he would have liked to write this himself, but gave up the idea because of his eyes. When it was finished he said, "That's what I want—that's just like me."

Perhaps the thing Al believes most strongly is that he is no different from any other young American in uniform. He expects no special credit or sympathy for what he did, and he feels no bitterness over his personal tough luck. At the present time he is not "blind," but there is less than 5 per cent of normal vision in his one remaining eye. The doctors believe there is a chance that this may improve slightly.

Al Schmid

MARINE

CHAPTER ONE

Al

"I CAN stand anything," said Sergeant Albert A. Schmid, "but I sure hate to be called a hero, especially when it comes from the other boys. I heard a couple of them the other night, when I was coming out of the hospital. They said, 'There goes the hero,' or something like that. I went back to them and told them, 'Don't ever let me hear you say that again—I'll kill you, I'll get some of my boys to bring you to me and I'll break your necks! You can say, 'There goes Smitty, or Machine Gun Smitty, if you want to, or Killer'—I got that for a while after I came back from the Island; it isn't pretty, but I don't mind it.

"I told them, 'Don't steal from me, and don't call me that name again.'

"They were just new fellows and I guess they didn't know any better."

I told Sergeant Schmid I would try to write his story without overworking the word "hero."

"You can say I'm just one of the boys," he said. "Just one of the gophers of Guadalcanal. That's what the Marines in our outfit called each other, and it was a pretty good name for us, the way we were always duck-

AL SCHMID—MARINE

ing in and out of our holes. We were a pretty crazy bunch, and we didn't care for anything but killing Japs."

Sergeant Schmid is 22 years old and has thick sandy hair that keeps flying up in an exuberant cowlick. In spite of the way he talks sometimes, he isn't a killer at all—except for Japs.

"I don't mean we weren't scared," he said. "We were scared as hell. But you'd never know it from the way we acted. We used to carry our .45's tied on a string around our waists, like a gang of cowpunchers. We'd walk along and when we'd meet some guy from our own outfit we'd say, 'Halt, pardner, and draw your weapon,' and then we'd pull our guns.

"The lieutenant would yell, 'Cut that out—do you want to kill somebody?' And we'd laugh and say, 'Sure we want to kill somebody.'"

Sergeant Schmid put a cigarette in his mouth and lit a match. When he lifted his hand the match and the cigarette didn't quite meet; he laid the flat side of the paper match against the end of the cigarette and drew it steadily across until the flame was in the right place.

"Those goddam fools," he said, cheerfully. "I never take a smoke that I don't think of those simple suckers out there. At night you couldn't smoke—it was just like saying to the Japs, come on and shoot me. So as soon as daylight would start to come I would light one up, and lean on my elbows out of what we called the back window. It was just a row of sandbags on the back of our

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hole. I would stand there and watch the other heads come popping up out of their holes, and light up.

"It was still kind of gray, in the early dawn, and I could see the little hunks of cigarette fire sticking out of the ground all over the place.

"Boy, I used to laugh at those simple buggers in the morning. We would start yelling at each other, and cussing and laughing. You'd think the Japs were a thousand miles away instead of just across the river. We just felt good that another night was over and we were still all there together.

"Then pretty soon the sun would really come out, and we'd have chow, and get to work on our guns again . . ."

Sergeant Schmid's left hand groped along the table for the ash tray.

"We're still the same crazy kind of a bunch in the hospital," he said. "Still raising cain all the time. There's another Marine down there who got a piece of shrapnel through his throat so he can't talk—he has a little tube stuck in his neck, and all he can do is kind of whisper. The only time I can hear him is when he is cussing me out. He and I go out together and get to acting like a couple of crazy nuts. I'll say to him, 'Come on, Red, speak up for Christ's sake, I can hardly hear you,' and he'll give me a shove and say, 'Go to hell, you blind bat'—I can just about hear him—'If I wrote it down for you, you couldn't read it,' and push me up against a

wall somewhere. Then we'll get to wrestling and pushing each other around.

"It was the same way on the ship coming back. I was about three-quarters dead then, with one eye cut out and half a dozen pieces of steel shrapnel in the other one, but the guys gave it to me just the same. They would bring me the ship's news and say, 'Here you are, Smitty, here's the paper—what's the news?' And I would hold it up to my face and pretend to look at it and say, 'My God, almighty, it says here that the United States is at war!' Then I'd throw it at 'em and say, 'Go on, I'm tired of reading the paper.'"

"There was one guy in the bunk over me who had three machine-gun bullets through his leg and had it in a cast for a long time. Boy, I'm telling you that cast smelled worse than anything you ever saw. In the morning he would let that leg of his hang down over my face and say, 'Come on, Smitty, wake up!' I couldn't see the damn thing but I would take a swing at it, and then he would jump out and run up the passageway hollering, 'Come on, Smitty, here I am.' And I would go chasing after him, stumbling over a lot of junk.

"Sometimes when some of the boys who weren't out there see us wounded fellows acting so crazy, they think we're all shell shocked or something. But it isn't that. We're glad we're alive."

"I'm glad you're alive," said Ruth, who was sitting curled up on a big green sofa across the room. Ruth gave

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Sergeant Schmid the silver Marine Corps ring that he wore on Guadalcanal—the one that got so dented up on the inside from the kick of his machine gun. She has blue eyes and light golden blonde hair.

The sergeant's face lighted up with a grin and he turned toward the sofa. "Now there you go again," he said. "Just when I get started trying to explain everything, you have to pull one like that. What am I going to do with you anyway?"

Ruth got up and walked over to the arm of his chair and sat down. Her eyes were dancing. "I don't care," she said. "What do you want to do?"

This is the story of Sergeant Al Schmid, who never intended to be a hero. If you want to call him one after you read this book, why, that is entirely up to you.

Al was born in Kensington, an industrial section of the city of Philadelphia, but when he was just a kid his parents moved out to one of the northern suburbs. Later on he worked on farms for several years, so he practically grew up like a country boy. In the country he learned how to run down skunks and catch them with his hands, and all kinds of hunting tricks that came in handy later on. He and a boy named Clarence Walters, whose uncle gave Al a job on his farm in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, used to go skunk hunting almost every night; they sold the skins for a dollar or a dollar and a half apiece. Sometimes when they were out on a date,

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with their good clothes on, driving along with a couple of girls, they might see a skunk running across some woman's lawn, Clarence would yell and stop the car, and they would take off after the skunk. In a few minutes Al would come back to the girls with the skunk dangling by its tail, and hold onto it while Sonny drove back to the old chicken house where they kept them alive. A skunk can't spray you if you grab it quick enough, but you have to do it quick—you can't just reach down and take it. Al didn't always catch every skunk he went after, but he never got sprayed by any; he was too fast for them.

Al's family on his father's side was German; his father, Adolph Schmid, has worked for a Philadelphia brewery for thirty years. His mother was Irish and died when he was 10. The main things Al remembers about her are that she never spanked him and that she gave him a BB gun when he was 9 years old. The section they moved to after Al was born was called Burholme, in the far northeastern edge of the city. When they moved up there the street they lived on was just a cinder road, and there were only two or three houses on it.

Al had an older brother named Ed and a younger sister named Marge. Ed was the serious-minded type who took some of the family worries on himself; he used to stay home from school to nurse their mother when she was sick. But Al and Marge were pretty much the opposite. Marge was a cute little blonde and, as Al says, he wor-

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shipped every inch of ground she walked on. He wouldn't let any other kid in school touch a hand to her and if anybody tried it, Al would lay for him and beat him within an inch of his life. He really enjoyed doing it, too. "Jesus Christmas, how I loved to fight!" he says, when he is thinking of this period of his life.

After his mother died Al got to roaming around the neighborhood with some kids who were older than he was. He was always ready to do anything they did, and more, if he thought they were trying to dare him. Some of the kids smoked cigarettes, so Al got some of his father's tobacco one day and put it in an old clay pipe and started to smoke too. The bowl got so hot he couldn't hold onto it, so he stuck it in the crotch of a little tree and stood there, puffing away and pretending he liked it. The other kids almost died laughing, watching him. Another time they were going to swipe some home brew from the father of one of the kids and have a party. Al volunteered to go down in the cellar with the boy who lived there and bring out some bottles. The home brew must have been pretty new because some of the corks started popping, and when that happened Al dropped a whole armload of bottles—CRASH!—and took off through the cellar door. The other boy got caught and his father beat the pants off him.

Al could hit a crow with his BB gun when he was 11 or 12 years old, and he would pepper stray cats and dogs and birds and almost anything that got within range. He shot

AL SCHMID — MARINE

out the old-fashioned gas lamps they used to have on the street until some of the neighbors complained to the police. He had a terrific urge to shoot. One time he shot a crow and saved it for two weeks, until it was good and ripe, and then tied it to a neighbor's front-door knob on Mischief Night, the night before Halloween. He pinned down the doorbell and ran across the street and hid in some bushes to see what would happen. A woman came to the door and unpinned the bell and looked all around, and then backed up to the door to start to go in. Her hand touched that dead crow and Al heard her scream—"Oh!"—and flop to the floor in a faint.

"I laid awake all night thinking I'd killed that poor woman," he says, "I felt awful sorry about it, but when I went around there the next day she was hale and hearty and sore as hell. She looked right at me and said, 'Al, somebody hung a dead crow on my door last night and if I ever find out who did it I'm going to kill him!' There I was, sitting two feet away, and I didn't dare say a word. And I couldn't blame her, either."

Al was the same in school as he was anywhere else. He did his work and passed all his grades on time, but he raised cain a lot. He would bring a live bullfrog or a dead snake into class and leave it on some teacher's desk in a box just to hear her go "Yow!" when she opened it up. He took mechanical drawing at the Woodrow Wilson Junior High School; every day when he went into class

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he would get four thumbtacks to pin his drawing paper to the board. If somebody got up off his stool for a minute and forgot to look when he came back, he was practically certain to sit down on one of Al's thumbtacks. Whenever that happened the teacher would look down over his glasses and say, "Who did that?" but nobody in the class would squeal on Al. So the whole class would have to come back in the afternoon and stay after school.

Somehow it all seemed worth while to Al in exchange for that one big moment when some poor sucker would let out a screech and jump four feet high with a thumbtack in his rear.

Al's brother, Ed, left home at a fairly early age and went to work, and Al made up his mind he wanted to do the same thing. The first chance he got was in the summer of 1936, when he was 15 years old. He accepted an offer to go up and work on a farm near Middletown, Connecticut, on a cove between the Salmon and Connecticut rivers. During the winter he worked for a contractor who was building a camp out of local lumber. Al went out with the men and cut down cedar trees and tramped around in snow up to his knees. He learned how to use an ax and snake big logs out of the woods with a team and some iron chains, and he bought himself a new .22 rifle and did some shooting. He liked to work out in the woods in the frosty air, and he liked the independent feeling of working for himself and getting paid, even

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though the money wasn't very much. There was an old lady living on a nearby farm who Al thought must be quite rich; she used to hire him to pick apples and clean out her well and chop firewood, odd jobs like that. One day she said to him, "Al, I've got a bunch of wild cats prowling around here and doing a lot of mischief; I'll pay you a quarter for every one you can shoot." Al kept after the cats until they were all gone; that was easy money for him. He bought himself a shotgun to have along with his rifle. The two guns, together with what he paid for his room and board, used up about all the money Al made; the next summer he found himself back in Philadelphia with only eight dollars in cash to show for his year's work.

He got another job right away through an employment agency in the city; this was with a Mr. Rosenbaum in a flat, sandy little town in lower New Jersey. Mr. Rosenbaum ran a number of business enterprises, including a chicken farm, lumber yard, coal yard and feed mill. Al's job was to work in all of them, for twenty dollars a month and his keep. He milked cows, made breakfast for the family and the rest of the help, gathered eggs, worked in the fields, lifted stuff around the lumber yard, ran the mill, collected and crated chickens for market, drove trucks, and fed thousands of baby chicks every day. It was tough work pushing the heavy sacks of feed through the sand in a wheelbarrow; half the time Al was stripped to the waist and sweating like a horse.

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He was small for a 16-year-old, but tough and wiry. And he would do anything in the way of work.

“I was always kind of crazy,” he says, when he thinks of those days. “I did what I felt like, worked hard, and raised hell.” He bunked in a shack with some older men who worked on the place; sometimes at night after supper they would have a few hours to play cards, and sit around, shooting the breeze. Al discovered various ingenious ways to torture his boss, Mr. Rosenbaum, a big fat man who was always tiptoeing around the corner to see if his men were working hard enough. They might be in the chicken house, cleaning it out with shovels, and Al would catch a glimpse of Mr. Rosenbaum just sticking his head around the corner, watching them a minute, and then pulling back so as not to be noticed. Al would wait until this happened a couple of times and then he would suddenly turn around and yell, “Hey, you old so-and-so, we’re not over there—we’re here!” The other men would just about die laughing at Mr. Rosenbaum’s embarrassment.

But Al worked his head off for Mr. Rosenbaum—he earned his twenty dollars.

One day Al was sent to the barn by himself to grind some corn. There was a pile in there as big as two or three rooms, and the mill was already turned on, and grinding away. It had a big belt on one end for the corn to go in and a couple of spouts on the other side where the corn meal and the cobs came out separately. Al’s job

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was to fasten a couple of bags under the spouts to catch the meal and the cobs, and then shovel a load of corn onto the belt on the other side, and then run around and change the bags before they got too full, and run right back and shovel more corn into the mill, and so on and on. Ordinarily at least two men would operate the mill but Al was too stubborn and independent to ask anybody for help. He set to work on a dead run and he ground that whole pile of corn in one afternoon. When he finished he was trembling from head to foot, and practically cooking with sweat. His brother, Ed, happened to drive up while he was working there and told him he was a damn fool to do that—he was doing three or four men's work. But Al said that was nothing, he did it all the time.

Soon afterward Al quit that job and went to work for Mr. Henry Walters, who had a big modern-type farm on the Bethlehem Pike north of Ambler, Pennsylvania. His brother knew Mr. Walters and helped Al get the job. The Walters family had a nice white house near the highway with a lawn and flower garden around it. They gave Al a bedroom of his own, with a dresser, and a big old-fashioned bed with a red patchwork quilt on it. He ate in the kitchen with the rest of the family; there were always about ten different things to eat, and plenty of everything. Al liked living with the Walters', and he liked the work there. He milked the cows and bedded them

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down every day, cleaned the stables, drove a tractor or a team of horses, hauled hay, plowed, ran the disc and harrow, packed down silage, and did general hired-man work. The main thing he liked, though, was the gunning. Mr. Walters and his brother and his two nephews, George and Clarence, were just as crazy about guns and hunting as Al was. They hardly did any work at all during gunning season. They would start out after morning chores and hunt all day, loading up their coats with rabbits and pheasants and squirrels from right around the Walters place; then at night they would come home and milk the cows, do a few things around the barn, eat some supper, break out the dogs, and go coon hunting until one or two o'clock in the morning. That was in November, when the weather was cool and crisp, with a touch of frost and the smell of burning brush in the air—and a big orange moon in the sky at night, when the coon dogs were running.

Al thought he had never had so much fun in his life as he did those days. When he made a good shot, and saw the game drop, he felt a fierce, burning joy in his throat; sometimes he would just have to let out a yell, he was so pleased with himself. One time he kicked up two pheasants together; they flew up in the air and split, but Al whirled his shotgun around and caught both of them—Pang! Pang! The men could hear him a half mile away; he was jumping up and down and screaming, "I got 'em both, I got 'em both."

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"I guess I was happier that day than I ever was before," says Al.

Mr. Walters liked coon hunting more than anything else; one time he spent fifty dollars for a big red hound that was shipped from Louisville, Kentucky, and was supposed to be the best kind of a coon dog. He was named Jeff. The only trouble with Jeff was that he didn't enjoy chasing coons; he would always wander off after skunks, which were pretty plentiful in the woods and cornfields on the Walters farm. Mr. Walters got disgusted with Jeff and said he was going to send him back to Louisville and get his money back.

"Boy, I looked at that dog and he looked good to me," says Al. He asked Mr. Walters how much he would take for Jeff, and Mr. Walters said thirty dollars. Al had fifteen; he called up Clarence and got him to go halves on the deal. After that they always had Jeff around. They would go out at night chasing skunks just to hear him holler.

During deer season in the fall the whole Walters clan would take a week off and go up in the Pocono Mountains and shoot deer; Al went along with them while he was living there. Even out of season they all kept their guns around and shot crows. Al used to cuss the crows plenty; they would come around at night, after the men were through working, and dig up the corn that was planted during the day. Then Al would have to get out with a hoe and spend several days replanting it by hand.

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He carried on his own private war against the crows; he would go out after supper, and lay for them alongside one of the fields. The crows liked to come down just before sunset; they were pretty smart, and they would circle down slowly, cawing and talking among themselves. Sometimes they would spot Al hiding in the bushes and go flying off. Al learned how to hunt them during their hatching season with a crow call, a little wooden whistle that was split at one end, and made a noise like a baby crow. That would usually bring a couple of old crows within range and Al would blast them to bits with his shotgun. One day he happened to look up to the top of a tall tree and he saw just the end of a crow's tail, sticking out over the edge of a nest. He had his shotgun and he blew that crow's nest a quarter-mile high, eggs and all.

On Sundays in the fall Al would go fox hunting. A farmer in the neighborhood had some foxhounds; he would line them up along a creek and they would usually start a fox. One year Al shot two foxes, a big red one and a gray one. The fox hunts would go on all day Sunday. Nobody would bother to eat. Al would run for miles sometimes, through woods and fields and woods again. Then when he got home at night he would wash up and go right out to a dance or a roller-skating rink somewhere; nothing ever seemed to tire him.

When he didn't have enough money to go out, he stayed home and played cards. Once he won two hundred dollars playing poker, but most of the time he didn't

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have much money. He was satisfied when he had a few bucks in his pocket. Sometimes he would get a job where he could make something extra, like the time he helped a Pennsylvania Dutch farmer named Kraus with some wheat threshing. The Walters' were caught up on their work and Kraus asked them if he could have Al for a couple of days. When he got up there he found his job was to carry the sacks of threshed wheat from the end of a chute to a bin on the floor below, and dump them. It looked simple enough. But when Al got started he found he just had time to get down the stairs and around a corner and dump his sack and get upstairs again when the next sack would be full, and he would have to hurry like hell to keep it from spilling over. It was the old Rosenbaum corn grinder all over again. There were some other men there, sort of taking it easy, and Al thought he would show them how to work. Each sack he picked up held over a bushel of wheat, and a bushel of wheat weighs about sixty pounds. Al had to carry them over his shoulder; in about an hour the sacks had rubbed his shirt to shreds and Al was carrying them on his bare shoulder, and that was getting raw too. The other men kept kidding him and saying it was time to knock off and take a rest, and Al would say, "What for? We're just getting started!" That night he had worked his shirt right off his back, and he was so stiff and black and raw he could hardly get to bed. But the next morning he went back and did it all over again.

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“I wasn’t going to tell those guys I was tired,” he says. “I would rather kill myself than do that.”

•

Al got to know plenty of girls while he was living at the Walters’. He took different ones to dances and parties and he always had fun with them. He liked to go to the upcountry hoe-downs, and drink beer and do the polka and the Paul Jones with some of the big husky Pennsylvania Dutch girls; they would come down on the floor like a ton of bricks; if you ever got your foot under one of those babies, you could kiss it goodbye! They had one dance they called the broom dance, where the figure caller would put his foot on the end of a broom and slap the handle down on the floor—CRACK! It sounded like a shotgun going off. Al liked music and he liked to sing; you could get him started on “When Irish Eyes Are Smiling” after six or seven glasses of beer and he wouldn’t stop all night. There was one place where they always used to get together and sing a song called “Papa Does the Work, Mama Gets the Pay”; it started off something like this—

*There’s a man comes round to our house almost every day
And he never comes around except when Papa’s away . . .
Um, um, umty dum, um, um, um . . .
Papa does the work, but Mama gets the pay . . .*

Al used to go to a place called Schoolhouse Inn where a little sawed-off guy named Pop Johnson called the

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dances; Pop wore a red-checked shirt and a black cracker-barrel hat and played the fiddle like the old Arkansas Traveler himself. He would get out in front of the whole gang, kicking up his heels and leading them up and down, and then he would take a turn and go right out the front door and around the hall and come back in again, with a pack of whooping kids prancing and dancing along behind him. Al used to love that; the windows would be open and he could hear the music, and see the moon shining overhead, and there he was—hopping around with a girl on his arm and singing at the top of his lungs.

CHAPTER TWO

Ruth

IN THE spring of 1940 Al came back to the city to work for the Dodge Steel Company as an apprentice burner at twenty-seven dollars a week. That was a lot more money than he could make at farm work; it looked good to Al. The Dodge plant was in the northeastern end of Philadelphia, between the Delaware River and the main tracks of the Pennsylvania Railroad. There are a lot of factories in that part of the city and they all look pretty much alike.

The Dodge Company was busy turning out electric steel castings on government defense contracts. Mr. Harry Maier, the employment manager there, was an old friend and neighbor of Al's family, and he helped Al get the job. Al worked in the foundry, at one end of a long high steel building that was shaped something like an airplane hangar. When the castings came out of their molds and cooled off they always had a lot of little hunks of metal on them called risers, from the pouring places in the molds. Al's job was to burn these hunks off with a gas-fed torch. The gas he used in the torch was propane; it came from the oil refineries down the river at Marcus Hook, and it was hotter than acetylene or carbide or any-

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thing else. It was just about the hottest stuff there was to handle.

The job was fairly simple, and Al caught on quickly. But the foundry was a dirty place to work, full of noise and smoke and the smell of white-hot steel. The black foundry sand got in Al's shoes and eyes and nose; by the end of a day he was spitting black as a coal miner. There were some other fellows working there about Al's age, and they used to play pretty rough. They would pick up a handful of steel shot that was used to polish rough spots off the castings, and sling it at the back of somebody's neck; or drop a lighted butt in somebody's hip pocket. Al's boss was a husky fellow named Larry; one day Al and some of the others were kidding around after lunch and one of them threw an apple core and hit Al on the face. He picked it up off the floor and threw it back, and just then Larry came around the corner and the core hit him smack on the forehead. He came charging over and fired Al right on the spot. Al said, "You can't fire me, I'm quitting," and started to go out, but after a while they both cooled off, and the boss asked Al if he was going back to work, and Al said he guessed he would.

When Al moved down to the city he lived at first with his brother Ed and his wife. Later on Ed went to Chicago to work and Al moved in with Jim Merchant, a fellow who worked with him at Dodge Steel. Jim lived in one of a long row of cream-painted houses on Tulip Street,

only a couple of blocks from the plant. The front windows faced toward the river and a lot of big factories and the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge that goes over to New Jersey. The back windows overlooked a concrete driveway leading into a row of garages and the kitchen doors of the next row of houses. Al had the back bedroom on the second floor.

Ella Mae, Jim's wife, cooked the meals and made lunches for the two of them. Jim was a few years older and about a head taller than Al; he had a round cheerful face and a little toothbrush mustache, and was a good fellow to go out and drink a few beers with in the evening. Al was used to long hours from his work on the farm; the eight hours a day he put in at the foundry didn't take much out of him. Almost every night when he didn't have a date or something, he would be up at the corner in Carl Henninger's taproom, shooting darts and playing the pinball machine for beers. Carl's place was the social center of the neighborhood; Mrs. Henninger served first-class food, and they didn't tolerate a bunch of drunks. Carl had a big icebox full of all kinds of bottled beer and if Jim and Al wanted to take a few bottles home with them instead of sticking around the bar, that was okay with Carl.

Jim had some guns himself, and a gun cabinet with a locked glass door in the corner of his bedroom. Al kept his guns in there—a double-barreled Springfield 12-gage shotgun and a new high-powered Savage .303 rifle he had

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bought for deer shooting. Every week they would get their guns out and clean them. Al never kept much stuff in his own room; just his clothes in the closet, and a bottle of hair lotion and a brush on the dresser, and maybe a couple of old magazines. Jeff, the skunk dog, stayed up in the country with Clarence Walters, but Al still had a half interest in him.

After he had been working at Dodge Steel a while Al bought a secondhand 1937 Chevrolet sedan and kept it in Jim's backyard garage. He got to running around quite a bit in his car, going to football games, and the midget auto races at the Phillies ball park or the Yellowjacket Stadium in Frankford, and the wrestling bouts in Camden Convention Hall. On Friday nights he drove downtown to bowl with the Dodge Steel team at Broad and Cherry Streets. Sometimes on Sundays he and a couple of other fellows from the foundry would get some girls and drive out in the country for a picnic; they would usually drink plenty of beer, and come home laughing and singing their heads off.

Al met Ruth Hartley for the first time in the winter of 1940-41. Ruth was a lot quieter than the girls he had been running around with, and at first Al didn't pay much attention to her. Ruth was a friend of Ella Mae's, and was working then as a comptometer operator in the big Sears-Roebuck store on Roosevelt Boulevard; she used to drop in sometimes for supper after work. She lived a

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couple of miles away.

Ella Mae and Jim used to laugh to themselves sometimes over the way Al treated Ruth. He just didn't seem to see her. He would go upstairs after supper, brush his hair and fool around a little, and then come down and walk right by her on his way over to Carl's for a few beers. He would just say "So long!" to everybody in general, and saunter up the street with a cigarette in his mouth. Ruth would be sitting there, with a kind of shy smile on her face, knowing she had a couple of miles to travel by trolley car before she would be home that night. And Al, who had a car of his own and liked to take girls out in it, would kill the whole evening playing darts and drinking beer.

At that time Al had plenty of girls anyway; he wasn't stuck on any particular one. He was pretty independent about the way he treated girls. There was one girl he liked pretty well until one time he took her to see a play called "Tobacco Road"; right at the start a kid was out on the stage, bouncing a ball up and down, and his grandmother came out of a little shack and told him to quit, but the kid turned around and told his grandmother, "Go to hell!" Al got to laughing so hard at that he couldn't stop; he was howling and whooping all through the rest of the play, and everybody was turning around to look at him. His girl got very embarrassed. When they came out of the theater Al was still laughing himself sick and the girl got mad and said she didn't want to go

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out with him if he couldn't behave like a gentleman. Al just laughed and said that was okay with him, and he didn't see her any more. Another time he had a date to go dancing with a girl named Fritzzi, and when he got to her house she wasn't around; her grandmother said she would be right back and Al should wait for her on the porch. He sat down and waited exactly ten minutes and then he went across the street to another girl he knew, named Helen, and took her to the dance instead. He wouldn't wait around for anybody, especially not a girl.

The first time he really began to notice Ruth was one night when he was counting pennies—it doesn't sound very romantic, maybe, but it's the truth. He used to save all the pennies he got in change from buying cigarettes and toss them in a can in his bedroom. He would keep them around until he had something worth spending. One night Ruth was at the house and Al came downstairs after supper and dumped his can of pennies on the kitchen table. He started counting them and Ruth began to help him, stacking them up in fives and tens. The pennies kept falling off the table and rolling all over, and they would have to crawl after them; they both got to laughing, and then Al purposely made some mistakes so Ruth would have to count them over again. It got to be a game, counting the pennies; when they were through, they both felt better acquainted. Al noticed that Ruth's shyness wore off quickly when she was laughing and hav-

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ing fun, and Ruth decided that Al wasn't so hard-boiled about girls as he pretended to be.

The pennies counted up to more than twenty-seven dollars and Ruth got quite bold and said that was enough for Al to take her out on a date. Al laughed and said he would take her out but he wasn't going to spend his last penny on any girl.

He took her out that week, to an ice-hockey game in West Philadelphia. Ice skating was Ruth's favorite sport; she liked it even better than dancing. After the game she and Al hired some skates and had some fun on the ice with the rest of the crowd. Al was good at roller skating but he wasn't much on ice; he had to admit that Ruth could skate rings around him.

It wasn't so long before Ruth and Al were having dates once or twice a week. They would go out to the movies on the nights when Ruth stopped in to see Ella Mae, or drive out to the country on Sundays. When the warm weather came they went to some of the barn-dance and roller-skating places that Al knew about in upcountry Pennsylvania. Ruth had plenty of other boy friends she went out with, but Al did all he could to discourage them. One time Ruth had a date for 7:30 P.M. and Al offered to drive her down from the Merchants' house after supper; all the way down the Boulevard things kept going wrong with his car—he had to stop because a tire got soft, or he needed gas, or the motor began to skip and act funny. He kept asking Ruth if she didn't want to change her mind

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and go out with him, but she said, no, she had made a date.

Finally they got to Ruth's house, and the other boy was waiting for her on the porch. Al said in quite a loud voice, "Shall I come back in about fifteen minutes?" but Ruth ignored him and started to get out. Al jumped out of the car and ran after her and gave her a noisy kiss, and said, "Well, so long, Babes, I'll be seeing you." Then he got in his car and drove off.

That was too much for Ruth's "date"—he just picked up his hat and went away too.

Al got so he didn't bother much with other girls; he found it was more fun going out with Ruth than anybody he had ever met. He liked the way she sat curled up on the front seat of his car and watched him drive; she would sit there a long time not saying anything, just watching him, and laughing when he said something funny. She was a wonderful listener. There was one thing about Ruth: when she said she would do something, she would always do it; she didn't change her mind all the time, or make up a lot of silly excuses.

There were other things about Ruth that Al might have liked if he had known about them; things that were very much like Al himself. Ruth had been working and earning her own money almost as long as Al had; her mother died when she was 9 years old and she had lived since then with her aunts and uncles. When she and her

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sister were small they went to live with an aunt in a crowded, noisy section of the city; they didn't like it there, and every week they would run away, and try to get back to the little farm up the Delaware River where they had been living before their mother died. They would go on Saturday morning because there was no school then; they would pack their clothes in a bag and start out on the trolley car. There was a place up in Frankford where they had to change cars and their aunt got to know where it was; somebody would usually catch up with them there, and bring them back. But a few times they did get to the farm and stayed overnight at a neighbor's house; in the morning they would have to come back to the city anyway because their own home had been sold.

Later on Ruth moved to Frankford and lived with an aunt named Mrs. Harper, who was very nice to her. But Ruth had the same feeling Al had about earning money and being independent. As soon as she finished high school she got a job in a five-and-ten-cent store, and later she worked at the Frankford Arsenal where they made cartridges for the Army, and for a dairy company. Her longest job was with Sears-Roebuck.

The house where Ruth lived with Mr. and Mrs. Harper was a big double house with a long backyard and lots of overstuffed furniture and embroidered armpads on the living-room chairs. There were four rooms on the first floor of the house and three of them had tables in them for eating: one in the dining room, one in an oversized break-

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fast nook which was really a room, too, and one in the kitchen. There was a wide front porch with a green metal swing that was always well shaded by trees in summer.

Ruth had a bachelor uncle, Howard, who lived at the Harpers', too, and he was always teasing her and her sister Mercedes about their boy friends. The first time they ever brought two boys home to dinner Uncle Howard got to cutting up, flipping the mashed potatoes onto their plates with a spoon, and spurning watermelon seeds around the breakfast nook. The girls were embarrassed at first, but when the boys started laughing, they got to giggling too, and everybody had a good time. Mrs. Harper kept saying, "My goodness, you'd think this is the way we always act," and Uncle Howard would tell her, "Go on, you're just putting on the dog because we've got company!"

Al and Uncle Howard hit it off right away and had a lot of fun together.

That first summer and fall that Ruth and Al were going together went by very fast. They weren't going "steady" but pretty close to it. They kidded around, holding hands, kissing on the front porch. Al never got very serious about his love-making.

Sometimes it seemed as though he couldn't be serious about anything. Ruth would buy pretty new clothes and Al would hardly notice them, or at least he would pretend not to. When she tried to show them off, he would

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just laugh and start teasing her about how tight they were. He would say, "What's the use—they all show your skinny legs!" He had a complex about her wearing hats—he wouldn't let her have any at all when she was with him, much less a new one. He would grab them off her head and pretend to throw them out the window of the car—all in fun of course.

Sunday, the seventh of December, 1941, rolled around—and as usual Ruth and Al had a date. But along in the early afternoon Al was still sprawled out on the floor at Jim's house, looking at the funny papers and trying to get up enough energy to get dressed. The radio was blaring away with some dance music. Suddenly that stopped and a voice broke in and said: "The United States has been attacked. The Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor." Al thought it was a play, or a joke of some kind; he turned on another station to get some more music. Pretty soon they cut that off too and said the same thing, about bombing Pearl Harbor. "All this time," Al remembers, "I was lying there like a dumb cluck, not thinking anything of it; finally I called to Jim and said, "Hey, Jim, the radio keeps saying there is a war with Japan—where the hell is Pearl Harbor?"

They talked about it but they couldn't make much out of the radio reports, so pretty soon Al got dressed and drove over to pick up Ruth. They were going out to George Walters' house near Prospectville, and they thought they might go skating. Ruth hadn't heard the

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radio at all and Al didn't say anything about it. It was a cold, bright, windy day—perfect for skating. But just as they drove in the yard the Walters boys came in soaking wet and shivering—they had been skating on the creek and the ice broke under them. They all went inside and the two Walters boys stripped off their shirts and sat with their backs to the stove, trying to get warm, while Al hunted around the house for his roller skates. He found them and put them in the car; he was figuring on going skating some night that week.

They had lunch there and then they drove over to Hen Walters' place, where Al used to work, and talked to the people there for a while. It was fairly late when they got back to the city. They stopped at the Merchants' house and Al wanted Ruth to come in and fix them up a snack. But Ella Mae and Jim were away, and Ruth didn't want to go in and fool around their kitchen when they weren't home. She told Al she wouldn't stay, and he kidded the ears off her about it, but finally he drove her home, and she went inside and had supper. Al said if she wouldn't eat at his house, he wouldn't eat at hers, and he went off somewhere and bought a sandwich. Ruth changed her clothes and Al picked her up again around eight o'clock, and they went to see a movie—"Honky Tonk," with Clark Gable and Betty Grable's legs. It wasn't until after all that, and after Al said good night to her on the porch around eleven o'clock, that Ruth heard about Pearl Harbor, and all the things that were happening.

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The next morning a couple of Al's buddies at the foundry, Jack Shay and Bob Wallace, didn't come in to work. On Tuesday Al asked them where the hell they'd been and they said they went downtown and joined the Marine Corps. Right there and then a big light flashed in Al's mind: he had been feeling funny ever since Sunday afternoon, but he didn't know what was wrong. Now he knew what it was. He was going to get into this fight with the Japs, and get into it quick.

But all he said was, "Aw, baloney—they wouldn't take you!"

The other fellows took some envelopes out of their pockets and slapped their enlistment papers down in front of Al. They were in, all right.

On Thursday Al got the boss to switch him to night work so he could take the day off. He stood in line for four hours in front of the customhouse with a couple of thousand others. The two men in front of him were both turned down—they weren't taking everybody. The man at the desk looked at Al's card and said, "You've got a couple of bad teeth, haven't you?" Then he looked at Al and said, "The Marines will fix them up," and slapped Al on the back.

Al moved on into the next room and held up his hand and somebody slapped him on the back again and then he was a United States Marine.

He got home at eleven o'clock that night, beaming from ear to ear. He threw down his envelope of papers

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in front of Jim and Ella Mae and said, "Well, I've joined the Marines!"

Then he picked up his lunch and went off to work all night. He was whistling as he walked down the street.

When he saw Ruth again he told her it was all set, he was going away January fifth. "The Marines were nice about it," he said. "They asked me if I wanted the holidays, and I said, sure, I had a date with a blonde for New Year's Eve. So they said, okay, you can keep it."

Al was pretty busy after that, selling his things and going on farewell parties with the boys. He spent Christmas Eve with Ruth, and she asked him if he would bring her some Japanese pigtails for Christmas next year—she still had the Japs and the Chinese a little mixed up. On New Year's Eve they went to see their last movie together. The picture was "Sergeant York." Al thought Gary Cooper's shooting was pretty good, but he told Ruth he was going to catch himself so many Japs it would make Sergeant York look like a piker.

It rained the day Al went away. He drove part of the way in his old Chevvie, to a place where he had arranged to sell it, and then rode downtown on the trolley car. Ruth met him at the Custom House, to see him off. Ruth had been swell, ever since he enlisted. She went on the same as always, laughing and playing up to his clowning. They had an agreement that they wouldn't get "soft-hearted," as Al called it. Once he said to her, in a kind of fierce but funny way, "If you start crying I'll knock your



Al sent Ruth this picture of his platoon from Parris Island after they had finished boot training. He is in the bottom row, second from right. Johnnie Rivers stands just behind his right shoulder.

Life on Guadalcanal: Marines cooking own mess.

Life Photo by Frank Scherschel



Life on Guadalcanal: Stalking an alligator.

Life Photo by Frank Scherschel





Official U. S. Navy Photograph

Marine landing boats at Lunga Point, Guadalcanal, on the morning of August 7, 1942.

Hand ropes tied to trees help Marines over rough spots in Guadalcanal jungle.

International News Photos



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block off," but Ruth didn't need any warning. She knew something about the Marines. Her Uncle Howard, the one who was always kidding around, had been a Marine during the first World War, and her sister Mercedes was married to a Marine gunnery sergeant who was stationed at Quantico, Virginia. They were always talking about how tough the Marines were, and how they always got into the fighting first of all. When Al first mentioned the Marines, after Pearl Harbor, Uncle Howard kidded him and said he would never make the grade, but now he was pretty pleased with Al.

Ruth had just started a new job the day Al went away, in a packing plant. She didn't have the nerve to ask her new boss for the day off to go with Al, so she just walked out early, and never did go back there.

Al's letters from Parris Island, the boot camp near Charleston, South Carolina, and later from the advanced training camp at New River, North Carolina, sounded cheerful and as full of fun as ever. He was still saving pennies from his cigarettes, and he would send Ruth a bundle of pennies every now and then, to keep for him. Ruth answered in kind; once she mailed him a lock of her hair with a blue ribbon tied around it; when he opened the envelope the hair fell out on his bunk and the fellows kidded the life out of him. After that he always took Ruth's letters outside to read; he never knew what was going to pop out of them. He had a swell picture

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of Ruth that he carried in his wallet, but she only had some old snapshots of him, one of them with his face pretty dirty from working at the foundry.

Al got his first seventy-two-hour leave for Palm Sunday week end and hitchhiked home. It rained for three days straight and they couldn't run around much. They stayed at Ruth's home mostly, and talked. Al seemed more serious, too—Ruth thought for a while he might be going to propose. But he didn't, quite.

In May, Al wrote he was having a forty-eight-hour leave over Memorial Day and asked her to come down to Wilson, North Carolina, and meet him. He would come up from New River, about eighty-five miles, and they could have the week end together. He sent her a railroad ticket and some traveling money.

On the way down Ruth stopped in Washington and bought him a heavy sterling silver ring with the Marine Corps insignia on it. Al said it was the handsomest one he had seen anywhere; it was better looking than any ring any of the other boys had.

It was hot and crowded in the town, when they finally got together. Every place they went was jammed with sweating soldiers and Marines, making the most of the holiday. There wasn't much they could do. Saturday night they bought sodas and listened to juke-box music—it was too hot to dance—and walked around, looking at the stores and houses. They came to a little shack in the Negro section where some colored kids were out on the

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doorstep, whooping it up with a banjo and mouth organ. They stopped and listened to them for quite a while; they were really good. Once they heard a steamboat whistle in the distance and they asked somebody where the river was; they thought they could go for a boat ride, or maybe take a swim, it was so hot. The man told them there wasn't any river, and that wasn't a steamboat—it was just a train that was pretty far off.

They had rooms in a crowded little hotel for Saturday night. Sunday morning they got up and walked around town some more, seeing about the same things they saw before. Al sort of hinted that his outfit would be shoving off soon, and they both got to feeling pretty blue. When it came time for Ruth to catch her train home in the afternoon, Al walked her to the station and stood there talking about going away, and how he hoped he would see her again sometime. Just then they started unloading a couple of coffins with flags draped over them, out of an express car, right in front of their eyes. Al couldn't resist saying, "See what I mean?" That was too much for Ruth; she just put her arms around him, and her head on his shoulder, and cried in front of everybody. After she got on the train she cried for two solid hours, until she was out of North Carolina.

Al stood there looking after the train. There was a beer joint near the station and the windows were open and a juke box was playing a song he knew by heart—"Chattanooga Choo Choo." All of a sudden the chorus

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started, and Al's heart went right down to his shoes—the words seemed to be coming right at him—

*There's gonna be a certain party at the station;
Satin and lace,
I used to call funny face;
She's gonna cry until I tell her that I'll never roam,
So Chattanooga choo choo, won't you choo choo me
home . . .**

Al thought he was going to bawl himself, but he didn't. He went over to the place where the juke box was and sat there a couple of hours, drinking beer and listening to that damn song.

A couple of weeks later Al got an unexpected forty-eight-hour leave to come and say goodbye. This time Ruth and he really had some fun together. They got some new snapshots taken, sitting on a bench and hugging each other, and Al got a letter from the Dodge Steel Company, enclosing a check for sixty dollars as his bonus for the year 1941. He was tickled to death with the money; he told Ruth he knew just what he was going to do with it, but he wouldn't say what. When it came time to go, Ruth and Jim and Ella Mae all went down to the Thirtieth Street Station to see Al off. They got there late and Al was still standing on the platform, hugging Ruth,

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when the doors closed and the train started to pull out. He didn't hesitate a minute—he sang out “So long!” and dove right through an open window, landing on the lap of a Marine top sergeant. Then he squirmed around and stuck his head out the window, still laughing and yelling “So long . . . ” It was so funny that even the old women who were there stopped crying and began to laugh.

Afterward Ruth got a letter from Al which said, among other things: “It all happened just the way I wanted it to, down at the station . . .

“I'll always want you to remember me the way I was, when I looked out of the train window, laughing and thinking of you.”

Along with the letter she got a little cardboard box from North Carolina, with a diamond engagement ring inside, and a card reading, “Till I come home, Al.”

It was the first Ruth had heard about actually being engaged!

A couple of days later she got another letter. “Dear Ruth,” Al wrote, “I received your letter today and I thought I would write right away because I think you know why. I can't write and tell you just what we are doing but I guess you have a good idea.

“Well, Honey, I hope you accept the ring I sent because if I kept the money I'd have went out and raised cain with it . . . When I come home I'll buy you a real big ring. I suppose you won't wear it anyway . . . Baby,

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when I got back to camp and the fellows found out I had sixty bucks in my pocket, you should have seen all the friends I had. But I told them this was one time when I wouldn't lend anybody any money, because I had something important to get, and the son of a guns are still trying to find out what I did with the money . . .

"All we are doing now is waiting; it's just hours now. I'll have to close now as it is time for chow, so until you hear from me, I'll say so-long for now. Your brown-eyed devil, Al."

After that Ruth didn't hear from Al for a long time.

CHAPTER THREE

Johnny

IT WAS stinking hot, those two days of waiting after Al got back to camp. The day he wrote his last letter to Ruth he was sweating so he could hardly see the paper. Everybody got restless just sitting around in the heat. Al's outfit was Company H, Second Battalion, First Regiment of United States Marines. The First Regiment had been training for months for an amphibious landing operation under tropical conditions, and everybody in it was dying to get started.

The night before the train pulled out the boys in Al's platoon put on a celebration. Al's special buddy was a Marine named Johnny Rivers, who had done some professional boxing before he joined up. Johnny was about half lit on beer and he went around punching big holes in the wallboard siding of some of the huts, and yelling "Here's another one for the goddam mosquitoes to come in!" A couple of other fellows joined in and they busted up eight or ten huts. Al thought this was carrying things pretty far—he got Johnny quieted down and out of the way before the guard showed up.

But the lieutenant colonel was pretty mad about the whole thing. He called the platoon in and bawled merry

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hell out of them and put them on report for about the umpteenth time. That meant they were restricted until further notice. But since they were all getting on the train to go west the next day it didn't matter much.

Al and Johnny Rivers had been together since the first day—they met in January on the train going to Parris Island and they stayed together all through their training. When the First Regiment was organized in the spring of 1942 Al and Johnny were assigned to the machine-gun company and put in the same platoon and even the same machine-gun squad. Johnny was about the same size and build as Al—short and stocky, with curly dark hair and a swarthy face and high cheekbones, and a kind of what-the-hell air about him. He could talk like an up-country Dutchman and he was always yelling “Yah-vo!” when anybody asked him something. One day the squad leader had them counting off in sixes and Johnny was No. 6; the others all counted off One, Two, Three, Four, Five, and then Johnny bellowed out, “Yah-vo!” Al thought he would practically break in two laughing. The squad leader was so mad he could hardly talk; he sputtered around and finally said to Johnny, “Say Six, six times,” and John repeated right after him, “Six, six times.” They all laughed so much the squad leader turned them in and they had to scrub bulkheads for an afternoon.

Johnny had been a professional fighter under the name of Indian Johnny Rivers; one of his parents was Indian,

but he was raised in a Lutheran orphans' home, and then lived with a family in Quakertown, Pennsylvania. He went to high school and played on the football team there; he was about the best man they had on the team in 1938. He got a job at the big steel company in Bethlehem after that, and learned how to box at the Bethlehem Boys Club. He won quite a few amateur fights before he turned pro; he fought in Philadelphia and in some of the hard-coal towns upstate, and he also fought in New York City. Al had seen him fight a couple of times before he joined the Marines. He recognized him right away on the train.

Johnny was a lot wilder than Al but in a way they were two of a kind. They both worked hard at their jobs and got to be the two top privates in their squad. But when they weren't working they raised a lot of hell. They would roughhouse around their hut, playing football and tearing down the bunks; one time Johnny was feeling good and couldn't think of any other way to express it, so he backed off against the wall of the hut and took a running leap through the screen door, landing on his knees in the company street. The first time he and Al got themselves a pint of local moonshine and brought it back to camp, they were staggering so they fell right through the captain's tent and woke him up; he didn't get sore, though, just spoke to them a minute and said they'd better get to bed.

Johnny and Al used to box together sometimes, although Al was no kind of a match for him. They were

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fooling around one day out in the company street and Al managed to hit Johnny four times on the end of the snoot; that sort of made Johnny forget himself and he went down in a little crouch he had, and came up with his right—WHAM!—it was the hardest wallop Al had ever felt in his life. Al just stood there a minute and shook his head, and thought, Lord Harry, that guy has a right! Johnny said, "I'm sorry, Smitty—I forgot," and Al said, "Boy, you don't want to forget too often, or you'll kill somebody with that right!"

One day Al and Johnny and the others were all set to go home on a forty-eight-hour leave when they got assigned to night guard duty instead. The story they heard was that the captain needed some men for guard work and the corporal said okay, his men would be glad to do it. What made it worse was the corporal didn't have to go on guard himself; he just went into town and got himself tanked up on beer.

The corporal slept in the same hut with Al and Johnny and about seven other privates. That night while he was still in town the whole squad took his bunk and mattress and stuck them up in the rafters, and made a kind of fake bed out of the blankets. They put the machine gun at one end and a beer box under the other and spread the blankets over it so it looked like a regular bunk. When the corporal came tiptoeing in about one o'clock he just tumbled into the loose blankets and flopped down on the

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hard floor. Everybody jumped out of their bunks, laughing and cheering, and the corporal went over and broke out the captain to give them a bawling out.

The squad still wasn't quite even with that corporal for ruining their chance to go home on leave, so next time he stayed out late at night they coaxed a friendly old dog into the hut and put him to sleep in the corporal's bunk. They pulled the covers up to his nose and he went to sleep as peaceful as could be. The corporal came in pretty late again and felt around to make sure his bunk was solid, and then got undressed. He didn't feel the dog until he got under the covers, and then he let out a yell—YOW!—like he had been shot. He ran out the door in his shorts, cursing and hollering for the sergeant of the guard. The squad had been lying there, pretending to be asleep, but they got up in a hurry and shooed the old dog out the back door and he took off down the street. When the corporal came back everybody was in their bunks, snoring away as though nothing had happened. The corporal kept saying, "There was something in my bunk," but finally the sergeant said, "Gwan, you're drunk," and walked away disgusted.

Company H had Captain Howland at first, but after a while he was transferred and Captain Ferguson came in to take charge of them. Al will always remember the little speech that Captain Howland made that day. He broke the boys out and introduced them to their new commander, said he was sorry to leave them but he was turn-

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ing them over to an old buddy of his who would take good care of them. Then he turned to the new captain and said: "I just want to tell you something about these boys: they do some drinking and they'll give you some trouble, but when it comes to fighting, they'll be right there; they won't run and they'll give a good account of themselves . . . "

"I guess," Al says, "we proved those words that Captain Howland said."

It took five days for the First Marines to travel from New River to a certain West Coast port. Al and his squad played poker every day and roughoused most of the night. They would climb into each other's bunks and start wrestling around; they kept the train in an uproar. The train stopped a couple of times out on the prairie to wait for other trains, and the Marines could see the prairie dogs stick their heads out of their holes and then duck back again. That was when Al and his squad got to calling each other gophers; if somebody yelled "Hey, gopher," they knew it was one of their own outfit.

Nobody was supposed to send any letters or get off the train anywhere. Al used to watch when they stopped and when some Marine would stick his head out a window and look around, he would holler, "Get your head in there!" and the Marine would jump like he was shot. Once in Texas the colonel stuck his head out and Al yelled, "Get your goddam head in," before he knew who

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it was. That time it was Al who pulled in his head—fast.

When they got to the coast everybody went out and did some plain and fancy drinking—they knew they were going a long way, and a lot of them wouldn't come back. Al doesn't remember much about his last few days ashore. There was one time when he saw some signs in a store window about Father's Day, so he went to a telegraph office and sent his Dad a Father's Day wire. Only when he came to pay for it he didn't have thirty-eight cents in his pocket and he had to send it collect.

About the next thing he knew, he was walking along a dark street and a big station wagon pulled up alongside him. It seemed like there were fifteen shore patrolmen who got out and surrounded him, but probably there were only two. One of them said, "Do you know what time it is, Buddy?" Al said he didn't and he wasn't worrying about it, and the patrolman said in a kind of bored voice, "It's 4:30 and I could turn you in for this." But all he did was take Al to his ship and pour him on board.

A few hours later Al woke up and went topside, expecting to see the city all around as usual. But all he saw was the Pacific Ocean, and a row of seasick Marines hanging over the rail.

Al's ship was a big troop transport called the *George F. Elliott*. She plowed along the water at a steady, even rate that would practically put anybody to sleep. The Marines took it easy on shipboard; they would get up late and

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have chow and along about ten o'clock in the morning they would go to school with the captain, or one of the lieutenants. He would explain about the islands they were going to and what they had to do when they got there. They had maps and drawings and photographs of everything on the islands.

After that Al and the squad would clean up their machine gun and pistols and check over the ammunition belts to make sure there were no short rounds. They did that every day. In the afternoon they would play cards, or shoot craps. Johnny Rivers always had dice in his pocket; he would shoot craps anywhere, even when they were out on maneuvers in the woods. If anybody had an old magazine—detective mysteries or comics or something, there would always be four or five guys hanging around waiting for him to get done with it. It didn't matter how old it was—they were reading stuff that dated back a couple of years or more.

Johnny boxed quite a lot on the ship; they had some gloves on board and had regular bouts. One time Al was in Johnny's corner during a fight and he kept telling him, "Use your right—Johnny—use your right!" Johnny was just sparring around and didn't want to hurt the other guy, but Al sort of talked him into it, and all of a sudden he came up and socked him with that right. The other Marine just stood there a second; he was out cold on his feet. Then Al saw his eyes start to go crooked, and he wobbled and started to fall, but somebody caught him.

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Johnny looked pretty worried; he came over to Al and said, "What's the idea, Smitty? I didn't want to hit him with my right."

Then he grinned and said, "Boy, I sure hit him, didn't I?"

Al used to watch the flying fish jumping around the ship and wished he could take a shot at some of them, but it wasn't allowed. The squad did some practice shooting off the fantail a couple of times, but outside of that they were very strict about shooting on board. There were some other big fish that followed the ship, whole schools of them, as big as sharks, and a lot faster and prettier—they were porpoises. Sometimes fifty or sixty of them would come leaping along, making graceful curves in and out of the water, and then suddenly they would change their minds, and the leader would just turn right over and start going the other way, with all the rest diving behind him. Al got a big kick out of the perfect way they would time themselves.

At night the guys in his squad would shoot the breeze, and hide each other's blankets, and sing. Johnny Muth, the platoon sergeant, had an accordion and he would get to pounding it, and everybody would yell their heads off, even after the lights were out. They slept topside most of the time; that is, when they could find a blanket, and a place to lie down without getting trampled on. The nights were really beautiful; there was always a cool breeze on deck, and stars—"Boy, I never saw so many stars," says

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Al, "except when somebody bopped me on the head or something . . ."

Sometimes they would get to talking about the Japs—they were always thinking about Wake Island and the Marines who were killed and captured there. Al thought he knew what the Japs looked like; he used to see them in Philadelphia, and down in Atlantic City, where they ran pinball games along the boardwalk and gave away kewpie dolls for prizes. He never did like them worth a damn.

"They always looked slinky to me," he says. "Those slanty eyes they had would always get me. They just reminded me of some dirty little rat."

After twenty days at sea they came to their first stop, a big port on an English-speaking island in the South Pacific. It was about the prettiest harbor Al had ever seen; there was a big bay and the city curved all around it on a hill, with little red and green and different-colored houses going up to the top of the hill. It looked just like a colored postcard.

The people there were tickled to death to see the Marines; they would come up to them on the street and say, "Wud yuz care for a spot of tea, old boy?" and then take them somewhere where they could get almost anything to drink but tea. They didn't have American juke boxes but the orchestras in the little dance halls could



Associated Press Photo

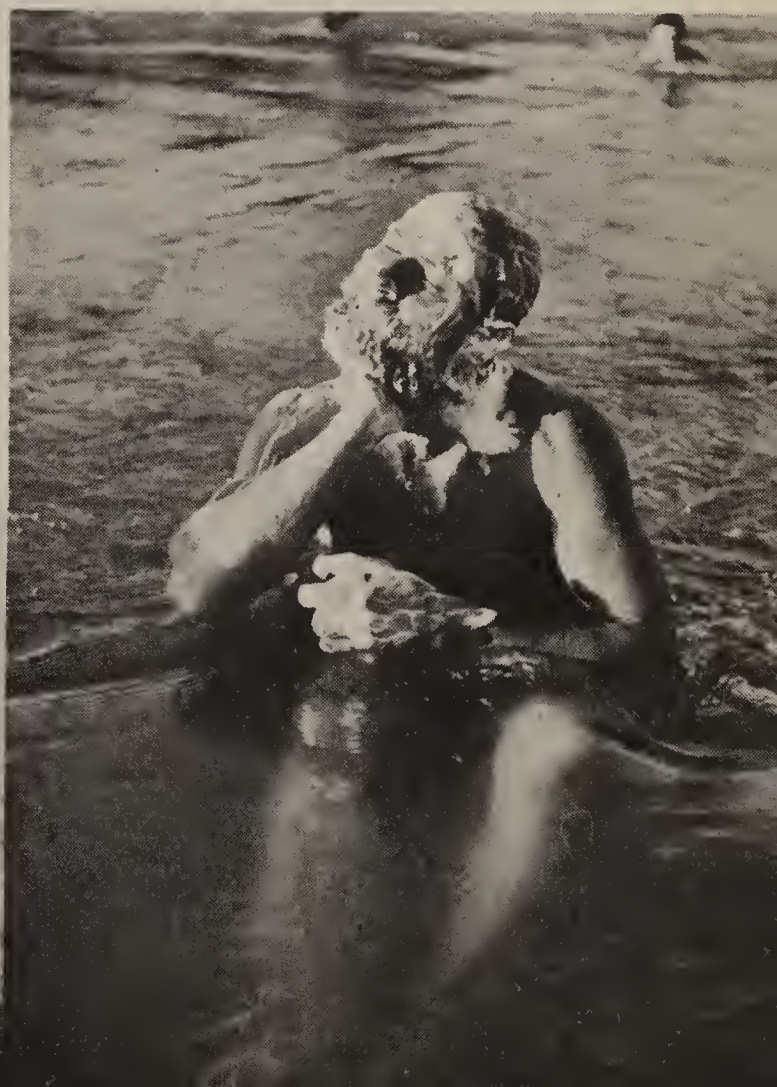
These are foxholes on Guadalcanal—with two well-hidden Marines in them.

Life on Guadalcanal: Bath in the river.

Life Photo by Ralph Morse

Life on Guadalcanal: Beachcombers' lunch.

Life Photo by Frank Scherschel





Official U. S. Marine Corps Photograph

The Tenaru River, where the battle of August 20-21 was fought, as seen from directly in front of Al's machine-gun post.



Marines crouch at river-side posts while a U. S. scout bomber flies over.

Associated Press Photo

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play the favorite American tunes, like "Deep in the Heart of Texas" and "Don't Sit under the Apple Tree with Anyone Else But Me." Al wasn't forgetting Ruth, by any means, but he did go dancing a couple of times with some girls who had a terrific limey accent, and he and the other Marines got a big laugh helping the girls learn to jitterbug.

They stayed at that place about two weeks, loading ammunition, and then they shoved off again and headed north. Things started to tighten up on the ship; there wasn't so much roughhousing, and everybody was very serious at the daily geography lesson. Al figured they must know every foot of beach on that island by heart.

One day all the transports pulled up alongside a pretty little island and the Marines got ready to make a practice landing. But somebody found out there was too much sharp coral there, and they didn't try it.

August 6 was the last day. After evening chow the Marines were ordered below, and the hatches were closed over their heads. All the lights were turned off except one dreary little blue bulb, like the kind they used to have in some of the juke joints around New River. Somebody said, "It won't be long now," and they all looked at each other in a kind of funny way.

Al and Johnny got busy cleaning the machine gun for about the thousandth time. Some of the boys sharpened their bayonets; they had a little piece of soapstone they passed around. Nobody slept much. Around 4:30 an

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order came and Al's outfit went to get their breakfast—an apple and an orange. Some of them ate and some didn't. A little after six the guns from the warships began a big barrage, and kept it up for the rest of the morning. At 6:30 another order came, for the first wave of Marines to go over the side. The hatches lifted and Al could hear the boys going over the side and scrambling down the steel plates of the ship. The guns were still making a hell of a racket, and he couldn't tell whether our ships were being fired on, or not.

He wished to God the waiting was over.

At 7:15 the order came down for the second wave. That was his.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Island

WHEN AL came on topside, it looked just like a movie. The big guns from the Navy ships were firing; the landing boats were strung out around the transports, waiting; planes were zooming back and forth overhead. They were our planes, scouts off the American cruisers. Al could see the island and its rows of palm trees rising up out of the ocean about two miles away. It looked green and fresh, but it didn't look pretty. There were too many shells hitting in there, hitting the hills and beach, puffing up big clouds of white smoke and dirt. Al had the tube of the machine gun over his shoulder; the water jacket was full and the whole thing weighed a little over forty pounds. Johnny Rivers had the tripod. The lieutenant said, "Get ready, boys," and they went over to the rail and put down the stuff, just like it was practice, and climbed over and let themselves down the nets to the Higgins boat. The other fellows passed the gun parts down first, and then the boxes of ammunition, and then a couple of steel carts.

Two Marines crawled up front to man the Lewis gun, in case there was any trouble at the beach.

The little Navy coxswain was white as a sheet. Al

asked him if he had been in yet and he said, "Nope, this is the first time." Al felt a little pale himself. "Boy, this oughta be good," he said to the coxswain. "They're sure poppin' 'em in there."

The lieutenant was the first man over when they got to the beach. Then Johnny jumped in the water and somebody tossed him the tripod and he took off. Then Al jumped over and somebody tossed him the gun and he took off. The water was up to his chest. He held the gun over his head and waded into the sand and ran quite a ways to the spot where his squad was assigned. The rest of them came right along and flopped down in the sand and got the gun set up.

In a few minutes the order came to move on and set up further inshore. They broke down the gun and ran again and set up again. They kept doing that for most of the morning, covering fifty to a hundred yards at a time. The sand was hotter than all hell and there were millions of sand flies and little red ants that had a nasty sting. But they had to stay belly down in the sand until they got to a cocoanut grove. They started working their way through there and grabbed themselves a lot of cocoanuts. They were all starved, after that apple and orange breakfast.

Al smashed open a few cocoanuts and drank the cool milk. But later on he got so he didn't care for cocoanuts. They worked him too hard.

So far his squad hadn't run into any firing at all. There

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were rifles popping in the woods up ahead, and the big-gun barrage was still hitting the Japs in the hills.

Around noon they got word that another party of Marines had already captured the airfield, which was the main objective. Somebody pulled the Jap flag off the pole there and ran Old Glory up to the top and the Marines gave a cheer.

The Japs were running away and the Marines were chasing them and it was still just like a movie.

Al's squad chased after the Japs all that day, and two more days; they weren't up in front of the other Marines, nor way behind, but somewhere along in the middle. They pushed on through the big cocoanut grove where the trees were lined up for miles in regular rows, like a plantation. They waded through swamps and rivers and into the first real jungle they ever saw. It was hot and sticky and the mosquitoes came down in gray clouds. The mud was always up around their ankles.

Al had the gun over his shoulder; that was his job and he never let it out of his hands, while they were moving. Johnny carried the tripod, and they both had .45's slung around their hips. Lee Diamond—Corporal Leroy Diamond—carried a Reising sub-machine gun and the tool kit and a box of .30-caliber bullets, packed in a belt. There were about a dozen other Marines in Al's squad; they carried a big supply of ammunition and field rations and a lot of other stuff.

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Lee Diamond was the squad leader. He was a quiet fellow unless you got him mad, and then his eyes would get hard and his voice would crack out like a whip. He was always watching out for the gun, keeping it clean, telling them to keep it out of the mud. Lee was a Jewish boy from Brooklyn and had been in the Marines for two years. Al and Johnny had been working with him since New River; they liked him, and had a lot of respect for him, too.

They pushed on that first day through the low part of the jungle and came to some hills where the mud was still up to their ankles, and they couldn't get any decent footing. There were long ropes tied to some of the trees which the Marines who had gone ahead had left there; Al would take hold of one with his right hand and pull himself up a slope, holding his forty pounds of gun with his left. Then he would find the next rope and take another hitch of twenty or thirty feet. He would never let the gun get down in the mud; if he had to put it down he would always lay it on some leaves or boxes or something. When he was going through a river with water up to his belly he would put his .45 on top of his helmet and then put the machine gun on top of that and balance it with his two hands and get across somehow. One time they got to the top of a steep hill and looked down to the bottom where they had to go—there was slippery, slimy jungle mud a foot thick on the slope there, and Al said to Johnny, "How in Christ's name are we supposed to get down there?" Johnny laughed and said,

"Slide down on your ass, you damn fool." He hung the tripod over his back and Al got the gun over one shoulder and they slid down on that soft mud just like they were going down a roller coaster. The mud ran up their pants legs and plastered them up to the hips but they kept the gun out of it, anyway.

That was on the third day of the chase, and they still hadn't caught any Japs.

They got so thirsty, going through the jungle, that when they came to a little stream they took off their revolvers and just flopped down in the water, clothes and all, rolling around and drinking like pigs. Then they would sit on the bank and dangle their muddy shoes in the water with their feet in them, and break up some hardtack and soak it until they could get it down their throats. They got so thirsty sometimes they drank all the water out of the spare can for the machine gun—rust, oil and everything. Some of them even wanted to drink the water out of the gun itself but Al wouldn't stand for that.

All the time the sergeant kept after them to get a move on, to hurry up. They would stop for a minute, to take a blow, or smoke a cigarette, and before they were half through the sergeant would yell, "Let's go! Let's go! Come on, we gotta catch up to 'em." They told each other that the sergeant could go to hell, did he think they were a bunch of mules or something? They hollered and bitched and carried on.

It was easy for the riflemen to get way up ahead, run-

ning along like a bunch of goddam fools. But how were they supposed to keep up with them, with all the heavy stuff they had to carry?

The sand in the river bottoms got inside Al's shoes and socks and started rubbing his feet raw. By the time they got set up on the second night in the hills he had blisters as big as quarters on both his feet.

That second night things began to get pretty hot around the island. There was a lot of firing from the east—big naval guns—and some Jap planes flew in and dropped flares all over the place. It was just like broad daylight. Everybody went down in the mud and stayed there. Al lay flat on the ground and pushed his face in the mud with the rest of them. Those Jap planes had machine guns and they were using them.

Next day the Marines knew that a big sea battle had taken place off the island. But they didn't know, then, that one Australian and three American cruisers had been sunk. To make things worse some of the Jap planes went after the American transports during the second day and sank Al's ship, the *George F. Elliott*, with seven or eight bombs. Al's good uniforms and the sharpshooting medals that he won at New River went down with the *Elliott*, plus a lot of more important things, like food and supplies.

Al heard about it when he came back from the hills. On the third day all the Marines were ordered to come back and take positions guarding a five-mile beachhead

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around Henderson airfield. After the disaster of losing those four cruisers, a Japanese landing and counterattack could happen at almost any minute.

Al and the rest of the squad felt pretty good on the return trip. It was almost like getting back to civilization again to be on the beach, with a lot of fairly clean khaki uniforms around. Al figured he was about due for a good hot meal of meat and potatoes, or even stew would be all right—he had been eating hardtack and cocoanuts and field rations now for three days. There were about a thousand Marines who had the same idea; Al had to stand in line more than an hour before he finally got to the field kitchen. He was carrying the lid from a mess kit and he started to hold it out before he saw what they had there—a big pot of cooked rice and a stack of hard-looking crackers. Everybody was getting two spoonfuls of rice and one cracker.

Al looked down at that Jap rice and his stomach sort of turned over, and he felt mad and miserable at the same time. “Gimme the cracker,” he said, and walked away.

It didn't seem so much like a movie any more.

Al's outfit, Company H, was sent to hold a section of the front where the Tenaru River ran down to the ocean. It was about a mile and a half from the center of the airfield and the captured Jap pagoda that was now serving as the Marine Aviation Headquarters Command Post. Al's squad dug in near the west bank of the Tenaru, about

a hundred yards from the ocean itself. They had come across the Tenaru on their first day ashore; it was a brown sluggish stream about fifty yards wide near the mouth, and easy to wade. There was a sandbar across the mouth of it so that when the tide was low the water would just back up and stand there, slow and muddy-looking, waiting for the tide to change. Sometimes the Marines couldn't make up their minds whether it was flowing backward or forward.

The first job was to get a good nest built for the gun. First they dug a semicircular trench around the back of their position, about four feet deep and two feet wide. The ground in the center was left level for the gun platform. The trench was deep enough so that when they stood in it the gun came about up to their chests. Then they stacked sandbags up in front and all around the outside of the trench, and plastered the bags inside and out with river mud. They put two big cocoanut logs across the top as a protection against mortar fire. That was Diamond's idea; he wanted to make the place just like a little fort. They camouflaged the whole thing with palm fronds and green leaves, until it was practically invisible from ten yards away. It took four or five days to build the nest, but when they got through they knew they had something good.

The spot they were holding was a kind of corner position; the ocean was on their left side, and the river in front, and the next Marine machine gun was about

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a hundred yards to the right, near a little bend in the river. There were cocoanut trees on both sides of the river, coming almost down to the water. They kept a twenty-four-hour watch on the gun; two or three men from the squad were up there all the time. The rest of them would stay about thirty or forty feet behind, lounging on their blankets and killing time. When it came to going into action Lee Diamond was the one in charge; he told them when to start firing, and picked out the targets if the gun was firing free. Next to him Johnny Rivers and Al were the main two: Johnny fired the gun and Al loaded. When one of them got bumped off somebody else from the squad was supposed to take his place—whichever one could get there fastest.

They had practiced all that, many times: what to do when one of them got knocked off behind the gun, how to throw him away and get rid of him fast.

The gun was the most important member of the squad, and they knew it. They greased it and petted it and painted a shamrock on it, for Al, and the word CHIEF, for Johnny. The other fellows in the squad used to laugh when Al put his cheek down close to the steel barrel and patted it, and said, "Well, baby, are you gonna speak your piece tonight?"

The Japs were busy all the time; their planes came over every day to bomb the airfield, and they usually had some Zeros along that would swoop down and try to

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machine-gun the Marines along the beach. Al and all the other guys had their foxholes scattered around behind the gun; they would have to jump in them two or three times a day. One day Al was lugging a bag of sand over to the nest when three Zeros pounced down out of nowhere and began banging away, *rat-tat-tat-tat!* Al threw that sandbag off his shoulder like it was a paper bag, and hit the ground with everything he had.

There was a big Jap cruiser that would line up off shore those first few days and shell them in broad daylight. Al could see it as plain as day there, between the two islands; the air was so clear he could even see the little puffs of smoke coming out of it when it fired. The cruiser's aim was bad, but the shells sounded awful big coming in and hitting in the hills.

They used to cuss that cruiser and wish to God they would get some planes.

Then one morning when the shelling started, some American Flying Fortresses suddenly turned up and took off after the cruiser. The Marines were so excited they came out of their holes and stood up cheering their heads off. One of the Fortresses dropped a bomb and it hit the cruiser smack on the fantail, the very first shot—she started to turn, and settle down in big clouds of black smoke. Al and the other guys in his squad nearly went crazy then; they jumped up and down and threw their helmets on the ground and punched each other and hollered, "Burn, you sonova bitch! Burn, you sucker! Burn!"

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Al borrowed the glasses from the lieutenant and took a look—Boy, she was burning!

There were some antiaircraft guns around the airfield and they opened up every day when the Japs came over. Al would hear them going *poom-poom-poom*, and he would see the three little puffs of smoke they made in the sky with their shells. The first three would be behind the Japs, and the next three would be a little closer, and the next three would be right in there among them. Then sometimes one of the Japs would drop out and begin to smoke and fall, and the next second he would go slamming down behind the trees up there. The Marines would jump out of their holes and celebrate when that happened; they didn't care how many more bombs were dropped. All the rest of the day they would go around saying to each other: "Wasn't that a beauty? Boy, that hit her square—wasn't that something?"

Al's squad saw some cows one day that must have been there on a plantation before the Japs came to Guadalcanal. They shot one and cut it up and made a big stew in a five-gallon tin that had been full of dried eggs; they cut holes in the top of the can and hung it over a fire with some wires. Bull Warren, who was on the next machine gun, was the butcher and chef combined. He was a big beefy guy who didn't care what he said or did to anybody; he stood there and yelled "Chow!" and the Marines came running from all over to spear themselves

a piece of half-cooked cow. The lieutenant was right there with them, and they all wolfed it down like a bunch of tramps.

Several times after that somebody would say, "God-dam, let's get us some meat," and they would go over and lay for a cow; they would shoot it and cut off a leg or something and tell the other guys where it was.

They had to do it; they didn't have anything but emergency rations the first week, and after that the food supply was pretty skimpy for a long time. Al's squad used to go down to the beach and pick up cases of canned stuff that were washed in from the wrecked ships. Once they tried to eat some of the canned fish the Japs had left behind. It made Al sick just to look at it; he opened a can and it smelled so rotten he tossed it up against a cocoanut tree. They drank Jap beer and a little Jap saki they found, and smoked Jap cigarettes: they would only last for two or three good drags.

There was a lot of Jap stuff around. Some of the boys were riding around in Jap trucks that were really regular Fords and Chevies; there was a General Motors handbook, in English, in the seat of one of them. Al went up one day to where the captured Jap tents were and found some photographs and a couple of pipes, and an aluminum compass with a wristband and gold star on it, and a big Jap razor with a pearl handle and an old-fashioned blade ten inches long. He thought: Boy, I'd like to give

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them a shave with this! There were bottles of pills all over; the Japs had millions of pills.

The tents had a Jap stink to them; part of it came from a powder they put in dishes and burned beside their beds. Al thought: Those rotten buggers, I couldn't stand it to sleep in a place that smells like this!

Another time he went around to see the Japs wounded in the hospital tent—or sick bay, as the Marines called it. There were about six of them in there, lying on cots, behind some fly netting that was draped over the top of the tent. They were a skinny, ratty-looking crew. Al hated the way they talked and everything about them.

The first time he saw a dead Jap was up the river a ways, when they first took over their new position. Al smelled the Jap first, and it didn't smell like the stuff they burned in the tents. The Jap was lying there beside a trail, sort of doubled up on one side, with his arms thrown out. He was pretty rotten.

Al looked at him a while and didn't have any particular feeling except, "It's good enough for him!" Later on he got to thinking about how many dead people he had ever seen. The only one he could really remember, outside of funerals, was a big fat salesman who was killed in an auto accident one time in front of Hen Walters' house, on the Bethlehem Pike, back in Pennsylvania. It was a wet night, and a couple of cars skidded together; Al ran out from the supper table and helped a couple of guys in

hunting clothes stagger into the house, all cut and bleeding. Then he went back to the other car, a little Ford coup that was pushed in like an accordion. He opened the door and there was this big fat guy in there, crumpled up over the wheel; he wasn't saying or doing anything. Al just shut the door again and walked away. He told Hen Walters the guy was dead.

There was a lot of broken glass on the pike after the accident and Al got out there in his shirt sleeves and directed the traffic for a while, waving a red lantern they had in the barn.

If it hadn't been for the Japs and the sand blisters on Al's feet, things would have been all right out there by the lazy-flowing Tenaru River. The gang would lie around after chow in the afternoon, playing cards with a greasy old deck that Bull Warren had, shooting the breeze, boasting about their girls. They would pass around whatever girl pictures they had; they had seen them all before, but it just gave them an excuse to look again. Al had Ruth's picture in his wallet, in his hip pocket; the boys would always look at it carefully and say, "She's a beaut," even after they had seen it a dozen times.

Al and Johnny kept the gun cleaned, with fresh water in it; sometimes they would have some extra time to play around, and they would get a cocoanut and pretend to play football on the beach. They went swimming once in a dirty little creek that ran into the river. The lieutenant

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came out and yelled at them, "Get the hell out of there, you crazy guys! That place is full of alligators." Afterward they found out the name of the stream was really Alligator Creek. One of the Marines swore he shot an alligator there one night that was climbing up a tree.

Al didn't change his clothes all the time he was on the island; everything he brought with him went down in the ship, except the stuff he was wearing when he landed. He tried to wash his pants in the ocean once; he took them off and rubbed sand on them, and just then somebody yelled, "Air raid!" and he had to dive face first into the beach to get out of the way of some Zeros. He also tried shaving with the ocean water but it didn't work at all; he let his whiskers grow.

Some natives came down from the hills one day and walked up to where Al was standing. One of them was carrying a little piece of white cloth on a stick. They were all sizes, short and tall, fat ones and skinny ones, but they all had bare black arms with lots of muscle. They looked so comical coming down the trail that Al got to laughing, and laughed more than any time since he landed on the island. The natives laughed right along with him. He asked them where they lived and one of them pointed to the hills and said, "Two hours." They were grinning and speaking all the English words they knew, trying to be friendly. Al asked one of them, "Why don't the Japs come down and fight?" and the native said, "Oh, 'fraid, Marines here." One of the natives had a head of flaming

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red hair; when Al's gang saw that they all laughed harder than ever; somebody said, "There musta been a red-haired Irish iceman down here one time."

The lieutenant who had charge of Al's unit was named Whorf; he was a real swell guy who treated the boys like buddies and stayed with them all the time. He and Al were always having fun together, even though Al was just a plain buck private. Al would say to him, "Gimme a butt, buddy," and the lieutenant would laugh and break out his cigarettes. When they were all lined up for stewed cow in Bull Warren's chow line, Al was in charge of keeping everybody in his place; he saw the lieutenant and yelled, "Get in line there," at him, and everybody laughed their heads off. One time in swimming in the river the lieutenant saw Al swimming along the bottom; he got on top of him and stood there until Al thought he was going to really drown. When he finally got up out of there he hollered, "I'll kill you, you long-legged so-and-so," and they roughoused around in the water.

The boys never could forget the time when Al came off watch and the lieutenant was lying there on a blanket, shooting the breeze with the rest of them; Al came up behind him and flopped down and said, "Gwan, move over; us officers have got to lie down together." The lieutenant didn't know whether to laugh or get sore about it; he said, "Goddam it, Smitty, how in the hell do you ever expect to get rated, the way you treat me in front of the boys?" And Al, who was feeling good, said, "What—

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those chicken scratches on my arm? I don't give a damn for that, I couldn't spend the money here anyhow."

Al didn't sleep so much at night, though. Nobody did; there was too damn much shelling and shooting going on, and they were waiting for the big Jap attack any time. Every night there were patrols out across the river, popping away at each other. The Jap snipers would try to get the boys at night if they could see a little hunk of light from a cigarette, or the reflection of moonlight on a piece of metal or a watch crystal. Al got used to the Jap subs and destroyers that would sneak in close at night to shell them. The Japs knew where the Marines were, all right, but their aim was lousy. Sometimes a cruiser would come along with some big guns; the first thing Al would hear would be B-R-R-R-O-O-O-M-M! out at sea; it would start the air vibrating all around and the shell would come in with that uh-UH-UH panting noise it had, like it was an express train trying to pick up speed. Then it would go whistling over and plop in the hills. Al used to sit up on his blanket and watch the little flashes of white light at sea, where the Jap ships were—he called it "watching the fireworks."

One night everybody got set for a big Jap landing party; they were expected to come in behind the Marine lines on the west side of the Tenaru. So Al's outfit turned around and set up facing the beach. The riflemen were put down close to the water and the machine guns, in-

cluding Al's squad, behind them, and then the mortar crews in a third line further back. But the Japs came at them from the other side, out of the hills. Al and Lee Diamond and a fellow named Coons were sitting there about ten o'clock, shooting the breeze, when they heard the pop-pop-pop of the Jap rifles in back of them. They had just started digging a new hole; Diamond and Coons dived into it, but it was too shallow for Al to get in too. He sat crouched up on the edge with his head bent down and his feet in the hole, ducking tracer bullets as well as he could. They were hitting all around him; he kept wondering why in hell the Japs were firing his way so much. Somebody yelled to him to start shooting, but he thought: The hell with that, I'd just be hitting my own mortar men up there. He didn't open up at all. The Japs hung around most of the night, pouring in tracers and trying to uncover the Marines' positions, but when the sun started to come out they sneaked away again, to the hills.

There was a tree there where Al was sitting—he was leaning against it part of the time. As soon as it got daylight he saw what the Japs had been firing at. One of the Marines had hung a roll of toilet paper on a little branch about a foot above Al's head; there were four bullet holes in the round white roll. When Al saw that, his heart took a dive down to the bottom of his shoes and came up again.

The lieutenant came around and said, "Anybody hit

here?" and Al said, "Hell, you couldn't hit any of these crazy guys." Then he showed him the toilet paper.

A little while after that he stood up and took off his jacket and took that damn roll of paper off the branch, and walked over to a place behind some trees—he had been eating too many cocoanuts again.

His feet were the worst thing; they were really giving him hell. The first time he took off his shoes and socks after the three-day march in the hills, a couple of layers of skin came off with them. The soles were practically raw meat. Al couldn't figure it out; none of the other guys had so much trouble with their feet. Some big blisters began to form on his soles, and they broke and let out a lot of yellow stuff, and filled up again. Al tried washing them in salt ocean water but they just got worse. The blisters got bigger and harder and redder; they were as big as silver dollars. His right leg was getting stiff, and he had headaches from it too. He told the Navy corpsman about it.

The corpsman was a wild little guy named Bob Day—the Marines called him Rosie O'Day. He said he would fix Al up. He got out a little rusty knife he had and dipped it in alcohol, and slit the blisters open and cut all the loose skin away; then he told Al, "This is going to hurt," and poured iodine over the while thing. Al was sitting down under a tree, but the next second he was about four feet in the air, standing straight up; he just hollered and

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hopped up and down, it hurt so much. Finally he got his dirty old socks back on over the blisters and limped off to fill some sandbags.

That treatment didn't cure him, so he came back for more, and Rosie cut his feet open again. The lieutenant heard about it and told Al to go to sick bay; that was in some shacks about two miles back in a cocoanut grove. It had been a Jap hospital before the landing. Al didn't like the idea of going back there; they might want to keep him, and he wanted to be with the gang when the Japs came. The next time the lieutenant asked him about it, he said he was sorry, he had forgotten all about it, but he would go down sure that day or the next. A couple of days later the lieutenant saw him limping around worse than ever, with the toes of his shoes cut off. He said, "Smitty, have you been down to the hospital?"

"Yes, sir, I was," said Al.

"Well, what did the doctor say?"

"He said I was okay—there was nothing wrong with me." The lieutenant looked at Al and said in a pleasant tone of voice, "You're a lying so-and-so; now, you get down there right away, or I'll break every bone in your body."

"Yes, sir," said Al. But he didn't go.

The lieutenant must have told the captain because the next day the captain called Al over and asked him, "Schmid, what's the matter with your leg?" Al told him

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he had a few blisters on his feet, and the captain said, "Didn't the lieutenant tell you to go down and see the doctor?"

"Yes, sir," said Al.

"Did you go?"

"No, sir."

"Well, you get the hell down there right now—we're giving the orders here."

So Al had to go. The doctor looked at his leg and discovered a swollen kernel as big as a walnut on the inside of his thigh. He called in the other doctors and they looked at it, and called it different names. Finally the doctor said he would have to send Al to a base hospital and have the swollen gland cut out. He said it was blood poisoning, and very serious.

Al said, "Good God, Doc, I can't do that—I've got to be up there with my buddies!" But the doctor shook his head. "I've got to send you back, Smitty," he said, "if I don't you're going to lose a leg."

Just at that very moment something beautiful happened. There was a roar of motors overhead and the Marines outside began yelling and cheering; Al and the doc ran out of the hospital together and stared up at the sky. Up there, flying fast and straight for Henderson airfield, were three formations of sleek new fighter planes, and they were American planes! They had red, white and blue stars on their bodies!

A hot wave of joy swept over Al and every other Marine

on the island. They thought: Oh boy, we're getting planes, we haven't got a thing to worry about now; there isn't a goddam thing to worry about; our troubles are over now! Al limped back and forth on his game leg, counting the planes—there were eighteen of them! They were the first American fighters on the island.

He had to go back now; there would probably be a big fight tomorrow between the planes and the Jap ships that were hanging around off the island. He begged the doc, "Let me go back, just for a day, so I can be there when it starts." And finally the doc said, all right, he could go back, but if his leg was still bothering him in the morning, he should be in the hospital by eight o'clock, without fail.

Al said okay, he would do that.

When he got back to the gang they were all wondering what the planes would do. They hoped they would take off first thing in the morning after the Jap cruisers that were trying to make a landing and shelling them all the time. Al told them about his leg. He said, "They're going to send me to the hospital and cut me up." Bull Warren, the big machine-gunner, was very sympathetic; he said he had a scheme to avoid it. "We'll fix you up," he said. "Tomorrow morning when we get up I'll get some salt water and heat it up in the pot, and you put your foot in there when it's boiling hot. That'll draw the goddam lump down." He kept saying, "Don't

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worry about it, Smitty—we'll fix you up. We'll cook it out of you." Al said he would try it, in the morning. He stood watch for a couple of hours on the gun, while Johnny got some sleep, and then they changed off; Johnny went up in the nest, and Al lay down on his blanket. It was about eleven o'clock. His leg was throbbing so he could hardly see straight. He felt waves of heat rush over him, and then, a few minutes later, he got cold, and began to shiver. He thought to himself: I'm getting that damn malaria, too. He fell into a kind of doze.

Around one o'clock he woke up with a bang. The Japs were dropping flares all around and firing from across the river. They were yelling and jabbering, and this time they were using machine guns. There was a regular white rain of tracer bullets hitting the trees all around him.

Al rolled over and pulled his shoes on and fastened his .45 and started crawling for the nest on his elbows and belly, all in a couple of seconds.

This was what they had been waiting for.

CHAPTER FIVE

August 21

LEE DIAMOND was right beside him. Al heard him say, "Jesus Christ, I gotta get over there." They were both crawling as flat as they could.

The Japs really opened up then; the air got stiff with bullets a few inches over their heads. They crawled about halfway; they still had twenty or thirty feet to go, and Al said, "Let's make a run for it." Lee told him, "No, they'll cut us in two." Then he remembered Al's leg. He said, "You stay back, Smitty; your leg is bad."

"It doesn't hurt me any more," Al told him. It didn't either.

The lieutenant was lying there a few feet away and he hollered for Lee, to give him some orders. Lee went over to his hole and Al stood up and made a dive for the nest. He didn't quite make it; he landed on hands and knees behind a tree. Bullets were snipping the bark off. Somebody said, "Is that you, Smitty?" Al said, "That's me—here I come," and made another dive. He got half-way across the back window, which was just a row of sandbags. He yelled, "Pull me in," and they pulled him in. There was a belt in the gun already. Al got hold of the box and got set to feed the bullets in.

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Lee came sliding in right behind him, yelling, "Come on, there's too many in here. Get going! Clear out!" Everybody got out but Lee and Al and Johnny. Johnny was there on the gun when it started; when Al came in, he said, "Okay, Smitty," and kept on staring across the river. It was dark in the hole. Al could see some of Johnny's face, under the helmet; he had his mouth screwed up in a funny grin, like when somebody socked him in a fight. He was watching the other side of the river.

The orders were to hold fire until the Japs started to cross. If they fired too soon it would give away their position, and the Japs would try to knock them out with mortars.

They held their fire. The Japs were coming closer, in the cocoanut grove over there. They were screaming in the high-pitched, hysterical way they had, when they wanted to get on your nerves. One of them would yell, "EEEE-YI," and fire off his rifle and the rest of them would do the same thing. Al could see the little white hunks of fire at the end of their rifle barrels, winking in the trees like fireflies.

There were streams of incandescent tracer bullets coming across from the Jap machine guns; bullets were thudding into the sandbags in front of the nest. It was a bright night, with a big moon out over the river, but the trees on both sides threw inky shadows on the water.

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Al thought: All right, you rotten buggers, you're going to get it.

He was scared and his heart was pounding. They were all scared. But that didn't mean anything. They knew what their job was; they knew each other; they had been sweating and working together a long time, just for this.

They strained their ears for little sounds near the nest—for Japs that might have sneaked across to come up on them from behind. Once Johnny thought he heard one, out there in the dark. He took his .45 and went out after him, but he didn't find anything. He came back and they crouched there, with just their eyes and their steel-helmeted heads above the ground, and waited. There was hardly a foot of ground between the three of them.

The Japs had made a good-sized landing that night, under heavy Navy protection, about three miles east on the beach. They were following almost the same route the Marines had taken on the first day. They planned to crash through the Marines' rear lines and grab the airfield before the Marines could consolidate. There were eight hundred to a thousand Japs on the west bank of the Tenaru when the battle started. And on the east side, at the mouth of the river, there were about two hundred Marines, with two machine guns and two 37-millimeter antitank guns.

About 1:30 the Japs started coming across. Al saw a dark, bobbing mass on the other side down near the river,

right in front of the gun. It looked like a bunch of cows coming down to drink. The Japs down there were being very quiet, but they hadn't spotted the nest. Lee stood up and began pushing sandbags away from around the front of the gun; he pushed them down like they were confetti. He wanted to get clear so they could tilt the gun straight down and fire into the water if they had to.

He said "Fire!" and Johnny opened up. He raked the dark blob of Japs back and forth and it broke up into a lot of little shadows and shapes, screaming and running and flopping down in the water. Bull Warren's gun, a hundred yards to the right, opened up at the same time.

It sounded good to hear the deep, *chut-chut-chut* stutter of the American guns. It made the Jap .25's sound like popguns.

Now the Japs had both Marine guns spotted and they gave them the works. They plastered them with everything they had—the firing before had been nothing. Bullets whizzed into the nest and threw chips of wood and dirt down the back of Al's shirt. Nobody was crouching down any more; they were standing up and working. Johnny watched for the spurts of fire on the other side and tried to douse them. The noise of the gun drowned out everything; Lee would punch Al on the arm, and Al would punch Johnny, and point to where he should fire next.

Bull Warren's gun suddenly stopped firing. Al thought: Maybe he's been hit. Then Johnny got it.

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A string of slugs tore into his face and the blood spurted out as though you had turned on a faucet. He fell back in the trench without making a sound. Al's heart thumped; he felt the hate rising in him—hot, and then icy cold. He moved over and took the gun and Lee got in position to load. They didn't have to say anything. They were trained for this too.

Al didn't feel scared any more; he didn't even feel tired. He felt cool and confident and tough, swinging the gun back and forth with his left hand. It was Johnny who had always called him "Southpaw." He heard his bullets hissing through the water and banging into the Japs' helmets. He knew he was hitting something now; he was ramming lead and steel into the Japs' guts and slaughtering them to hell out there in the water. That made him feel better.

He was seething inside with unspoken curses for the Japs, things he didn't have time to say. He thought: Die, you bastards, die! when he heard them screaming and sobbing in the water.

They were still trying to come across, in several places at once. There was one Jap officer who kept screeching and barking commands at the others; he had a nasty shrill voice that stood out over all the firing. Al thought: I don't care if you're a general; I'll get you too, and fired a burst in the direction of the voice. It stopped a minute and then it started up again—jabber, jabber, jabber. Al tried several times but he never stopped that voice—he can still hear it sometimes, jabbering away in his dreams.

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The Japs must have got rattled because they started coming over right where the moon was shining on the river; Al could practically see the buttons on their jackets. He waited till they were only fifty yards away and then he mowed them down like sitting ducks.

Once he looked at Johnny and thought he saw his elbow sort of twitch. The next time he looked there was a jacket over Johnny's face—Lee had put it there.

Lee was loading and helping direct the fire. Al would be shooting across the river to the left, and he would feel Lee hitting him on the arm—really *hitting* him—and pointing upstream. Al would swing the gun up there and hear the Japs yelling when his bullets ripped through them. A Jap machine-gunner got set up on the other side once and put a string of bullets through the water jacket of Al's gun, about three inches in front of his nose; the water spurted out over his lap and chest, and the gun started to crackle and sputter, like an empty kettle on a stove. The gun got red-hot, but for some reason it didn't jam the way it was supposed to when it didn't have water.

Lee spotted the Jap gunner who did it, and Al swung his gun around to his right hand and let go with a burst. It must have caught the Jap dead on because that was all they heard from him.

There was an old amphibious tank that the Marines had abandoned in the river on the first day; it was about a hundred yards upstream, just part way around the little bend the river made to the right. It was an ugly old thing

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that nobody ever thought much about until that night when a Jap gunner got in there and set up. He made a lot of trouble for Al because he could spot Al's position and Al couldn't quite spot his; there were some big trees there and they hid him in shadows. A mortar shell took care of him, though.

Once Lee thought he heard something scrambling around a few yards in front of the nest; he got his Reising gun in one hand, poked his head over the top and let go a few rounds. Later on they found three dead Japs down there.

A Jap bullet caught Lee on the arm and knocked him down; he fell partly across Al's feet. Al went on firing and loading for himself; he would look at the belt every few seconds, and when it got close to the end he would fire a short burst, rip open the magazine, and stick in a new belt. The sweat was pouring down his face like the day when he was grinding corn for Mr. Rosenbaum. He was talking out loud, sometimes, but he doesn't remember what he said; he just remembers hearing his own voice. He wasn't thinking, or worrying, or even feeling very much. He was killing Japs.

He kept it up for more than four hours, with and without help, while heavy Marine reinforcements came up behind him, and a strong force of Marines went across the river upstream and swung down to catch the battered Japs from behind. The Japs were stopped cold at the Tenaru that night; their whole attack was a ghastly flop.



Official U. S. Marine Corps Photograph

The losers in the battle of the Tenaru included these Jap soldiers, washed up in a sandspit at the river's mouth.



The winners were the Marines.

Life Photo by Ralph Morse



Associated Press Photo

Al (left) and Lee Diamond (right) in the Naval Hospital at San Diego.

Lieutenant General Vandegrift and Al, in Philadelphia.

Associated Press Photo



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Later on in the morning some Marine tanks went across and killed off all the Japs that were left in the cocoanut trees.

But somewhere one of them got through. There was a blinding flash and explosion and something hit Al a terrific wallop in the face. It was a hand grenade that exploded against the left stirrup of his gun. Al put his hand up and all he could feel was a wet sticky pulp, and warm blood pouring down through his fingers. It felt like somebody had cut off the front of his face with a hatchet.

He went down on his back in the trench. Lee was lying across his legs. Al heard himself say, "Goddam, they got me in the eyes." Then he could feel more pains, in his left shoulder and arm and hand. The shrapnel from the grenade had ripped him there too. His arm began giving him hell.

The Japs were still pouring bullets into the nest, and Al reached around to his holster and took out his .45. Lee heard him fussing with it and yelled, "Don't do it, Smitty, don't shoot yourself."

Al said, "Hell, don't worry about that. I'm going to get the first Jap that tries to come in here."

"But you can't see," Lee told him.

"That's all right," Al said. "Just tell me which way he's coming and I'll get him." Then he said, "I can smell the rotten buggers . . ."

After that he began to get kind of crazy. He kept ask-

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ing, "How's Johnny," even though he knew all the time that Johnny was dead just a few inches away. Lee kept telling him, "Johnny's all right." They were helpless, there in the hole, and it was getting to be daylight. There was a Jap sniper up in a tree across the river who was firing almost straight down at them. The only thing that protected them was the shelf where the machine gun stood; there was a ledge of dirt about two feet above their faces. The Jap's bullets kept hitting the edge of that ledge, knocking the dirt and sand down into Al's face. He knew the dirt was falling into his eyes, and he couldn't do anything about it.

He was gulping his own blood; he knew he was because he could taste it. It wasn't like when you cut a finger and put it in your mouth to suck it, either; it was like somebody broke your arm off, and let it run in a bucket, and then stuck your head in it. That's the way Al remembers it. He kept thinking: I'm drinking my own blood . . .

They were there a long time, probably an hour, when Whitney Jacobs, one of the boys in the squad, jumped down in the hole. Al was scared; he thought it was a Jap and he lifted his .45. He heard Jake say, "Where the hell are you, Smitty?" and he relaxed. Jake crawled around to where he was and said, "You'll be all right, Smitty—just got a little dirt in your eyes." Al said, "Hell, I got more than that in my eyes." Jake went to get him some water out of the spare can for the machine gun; it was

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full of rust and oil, but it was water. Al's steel helmet had been knocked off by the explosion and Jake poured the water in it. He lifted Al up a little and Al stuck his bloody face down in the helmet and drank sand, oil, blood, and everything. Jake lit him a cigarette and he took three puffs, but he couldn't smoke; his guts hurt too much from the concussion. He heard the lieutenant yell, "Jake, come on out of there; throw the gun out and come out." Jake called back, "I'm taking care of Diamond and Smitty," but a few minutes later he hopped out and ran back, ducking bullets that were singing all around. He was a game little guy.

The next Al knew they were taking him out on a blanket. He heard the lieutenant say, "Hey, Smitty," and he answered, "Whaddya say, boss?" and he knew the lieutenant was helping to carry him out. It took nerve to do that; the Japs were keeping up a steady machine-gun fire all around the nest. He said, "Are those our guns?" and the lieutenant said, "Sure, they're our guns." Al said, "Gwan—they're Jap guns—I know 'em." The lieutenant said, "Don't worry about it, Smitty. We're winning. It's in the bag."

They had to run quite a way to get out of there. When they got out Al felt himself drifting off. He thought: I'm going to kick the bucket now. He thought of Ruth, standing at the station. He still had his .45 in his hand.

He reached out with it toward the lieutenant. "I guess I won't need this any more," he said, and passed out.

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STATISTICAL NOTE

Of the eight hundred or more Japs who tried to cross the Tenaru on August 21, 1942, fourteen were picked up wounded after the battle and one was captured unhurt. The rest were killed. They were crack Jap infantrymen, with new uniforms, and medals on their chests—the best the enemy had.

The number of bodies counted within range of Al's machine gun ran into the hundreds, and the other Marines who were there that night credited him with killing at least two hundred of them. He never got a chance to count them himself.

CHAPTER SIX

Heaven

THEY carried Al into the hospital tent about eight o'clock in the morning. That was just the time he had promised the doc he would be back there if his leg was still bothering him.

He had plenty of things bothering him now.

His face and eyes were riddled with shrapnel and puffed up with blood and bruises; his left eye was swollen as big as a golf ball and Al could feel it hanging down over his cheek. The shrapnel had clipped off a piece of one ear and cut into his neck, shoulder, left arm and hand. One piece gouged a big chunk of knuckle off his left thumb. He had concussion and hemorrhages in the head, concussion and powder burns in the chest. His blood-poisoned leg was still bad. He thought he must have lost pounds of blood there in the nest.

He still had the conviction that most of his face had been blown off. He kept feeling again the warm blood pouring through his fingers, the soft sticky mess that was there when he first put his hands up to his face.

He was coming to, and passing out, every few minutes.

A boy from his company saw him in the tent and said, "Is that you, Smitty?" Al said, "It ain't my brother,"

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and then he said, "What the hell are you doing here?" The other fellow said, "Oh, just came back to take a rest." He had a bullet through his chest.

They pinned a red EMERGENCY tag on Al's blanket, and he didn't do any more talking that day.

He came to once in a truck going to the beach and once in a Higgins boat, out on the water. Then they were lifting him over the rail of a destroyer; he was in a sling. He could hear somebody say, "Jeez, it ain't no use taking him down—he's dead," and he knew they were talking about him. Al was so scared then that his heart came up in his throat and choked the breath out of him; he couldn't see, and now he couldn't move, or speak, or even breathe—he was paralyzed. He thought: They're going to throw me overboard; that's what they do on ships. In a split second he could see himself, wrapped in a flag, going over the side into the blue water.

He was alive but he couldn't tell anybody.

Finally, after what seemed like many years and an enormous strain of will power and muscle, he managed to wiggle a couple of fingers on his right hand. Somebody else said, "Look, he's moving; he's still alive," and they carried him below.

He was lying down in the hold with the other wounded when a sailor with a big bass voice suddenly yelled "TORPE-DO!" and everybody began running around topside. The destroyer was refueling; they started up the engines and backed off, breaking all the lines. The tanker that

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was alongside did the same thing: the torpedo went swishing right between them. Then the destroyer took off after the Jap sub. It went zigzagging around, dropping depth charges all over the place. One of them went BOOM! and lifted the fantail right out of the water; the destroyer fell back with a slap, and the sailors began yelling, "We got it!"

Al could hear all this in a kind of foggy way, but it didn't seem to matter. The thing he remembered most was the big guy who hollered "TOR-PE-DO!"—he kept hearing it when he tried to go to sleep. Some of the sailors came down and tried to cheer him up; they said there were hunks of Jap uniforms and papers and oil patches all over the water; they were sure they got the goddam sub.

Al thought: I guess I'm going to live, nothing seems to kill me. He wondered how many of his nine lives were shot already. He could have been killed a hundred times there in that nest. The poisoning in his leg could have killed him; maybe it would anyway. He remembered when he was a kid one time, he was climbing a cherry tree with his brother Ed; his brother kept telling him he was leaning out too far, and not to do it. Al was reaching out for a bunch of cherries, and the old limb snapped, and down he went—about twenty feet to the ground. He thought he was a goner then, but it just knocked the breath out of him. He could still feel that limb, the way it trembled under him, and he kept sliding out, further and

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further, and it went CRACK! and he was falling through space, falling and thinking wildly: I'm a goner . . .

He thought: Even if I live, I'll probably be blind, I got plenty in my eyes. The pain in his arm and hand was killing him, but his eyes were completely numb. He wondered if they were still there. He tried to remember what Ruth looked like; she was a million miles away, and he wouldn't ever see her again. He wouldn't ever see anything again—what the hell was the use of living like that?

Al thought: Oh, God, just let me get back to the States and I'll be the happiest sonova gun this side of heaven. He hadn't prayed since he was a kid, but now he lay there and said a prayer.

He prayed to somebody, he didn't know who it was. He prayed for Johnny Rivers, too.

The destroyer went first to a little island where they took Al ashore for a while. They put him in a truck and carried him to a hospital; it was just another big tent filled with wounded guys. What they had for a deck was just the bare ground. Al wondered why they brought him there; it was just the same as the island. Besides it was raining and very cold; Al got to shivering and almost froze to death, on top of everything else. The doctors fussed around with his eyes and took out some pieces of shrapnel. Every time they worked on his eyes he nearly went nuts from the pain.

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After a couple of days he found out why they had brought him there; a big hospital ship arrived and picked up all the wounded that were waiting to be evacuated. They carried him on board again and the surgeons on the ship did some more work on his eyes. Al lost track of how many operations he had; he almost wished sometimes they had thrown him overboard in the first place.

The hospital ship traveled around from island to island, until it had a big load of wounded and sick. Al got a sailor on the ship to write a letter to Ruth for him; he said to tell her he had been in a battle, and got hurt, but not to say anything about his eyes.

He said to tell her he was coming home some time.

That was on August 26.

One day on the ship the surgeons took some deep shrapnel out of Al's left eye. He woke up on his bunk about four o'clock in the afternoon, feeling hungry as hell. He hadn't had anything to eat before the operation, or the night before either. They were just bringing chow around to the wounded men; when Al reached out for it there was a piece of cheese and some baloney. The thought of that kind of stuff made him sick. He said, "The hell with it," and turned over with his face to the bulkhead. There was a chaplain there who had talked to him a couple of times; he was one of the nicest guys Al ever met. He said, "I'll get you something, Smitty." He went out and came back with a loaf of bread and some

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jelly and milk, and a bag of apples. They had a little lunch there, with the chaplain sitting on the edge of Al's bunk, talking, and afterward Al felt a lot better. He will always remember that chaplain.

A week or so later they came back to the big English-speaking city where Al had first landed a month before, the place with the pretty post-card harbor, where they always wanted to give you a cup of tea. There was a big American hospital there, with eye specialists and everything. They looked at Al and said they would have to take his left eye out, at least; it was swelled up to four or five times normal size, and badly infected. Every time they would take the dressings off to treat it, Al could feel the eyeball sort of flop back against the socket; he knew it was practically out already. But he refused to give permission for the operation. He said he was going to keep it in his head even if it wasn't any good. He said he didn't want any goddam glass eye.

The people in the city were sympathetic and kind to the wounded Marines; they brought them everything they could think of to eat or drink. They gave them flowers and radios and books. There was one middle-aged lady who was almost too sympathetic; she used to come into the ward where Al was, and talk in a kind of coy soprano voice, very fast and very long; she could really talk your ears right off. She got on Al's nerves but he tried to be polite; he didn't want to hurt her feelings. The boys got to calling her "Windy" and when they spotted her

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coming they would say, "Here comes Windy," and pretend to be asleep. One day she came in and walked over to Al's cot and called out to him in that old-maidish way, "Are you sleeping?" Al couldn't resist the impulse; he turned over on his pillow real fast and said, "Yes, I'm sleeping," in a falsetto voice that was a pretty good imitation of hers. The other boys got to laughing so hard they had to stuff the sheets in their mouths to stop.

That was about the only thing that kept Al from going bughouse—kidding around with the boys. When he was feeling fairly good he could even make a dying man laugh.

After a while he got so he could hobble around a little bit, with a bandage over his eyes; naturally everywhere he went people were nice to him and wanted to shake hands with him. He went out shopping one day with some other Marines from the hospital and bought Ruth a big silver bracelet that they said was very pretty. The doctors kept urging him to have his left eye out; they told him they might be able to save the right one, but if he waited the infection would probably spread. On the day he finally agreed to have the operation he told the doc he might as well go out on the town. He went down to the St. George's Hotel with some other shot-up patients and drank everything anybody gave him; people would come up and say, "Have a Horse's Neck"—that was the name of a drink they had—and Al would pour it down. He drank beer and Scotch and champagne. He didn't give a damn.

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His legs gave out and they had to carry him back to bed in the hospital.

Two days later the doctors cut out his left eye.

Except for his eyes, Al's shrapnel wounds began to heal up pretty fast. But his blood-poisoned leg and feet got worse. When the time came for Al to get on the American liner that was going back to the States, he could hardly walk at all. His feet were wrapped up in bandages like a mummy's; he went up the gangplank on his heels, with the other fellows helping him along. He couldn't see anything, of course.

There was a Doc Ward on the ship who took care of Al's feet; he was a jolly guy and they used to have a good time, cussing each other. Doc would take a knife and say, "Here we go," and he would cut around the blisters on Al's feet, and slit the skin away and drain them. Al would kick and howl for mercy and Doc would say, "Ah, what the hell's the matter—are you getting yellow?" Al would yell, "You're nothing but a goddam butcher!"

He got to calling Doc, "The Little Butcher."

Al bunked in the hold in the same compartment with a wounded Marine from his own outfit named Eddie de Joinville. Eddie had three machine-gun bullets through his leg. They used to sit there, kidding each other about their wounds. Al would say, "Jesus Christmas, anybody that got three bullets in his leg doesn't deserve to live—when he gets one he oughta know enough to pull his leg

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in.” And Eddie would tell him, “Gwan, at least I didn’t try to play catch with a goddam hand grenade!”

Al didn’t sleep well at night and it was hard to wake him up in the morning. Eddie would hobble over around nine o’clock and stand beside his bunk and say, “Come on, get up, I’ll knock your block off.” Al would make a pass at him and Eddie would run up the passageway, calling, “Here I am—come and get me.” Al couldn’t see him but he would stumble out of bed and go after him, and Eddie would duck in some door and tease him—“Here I am, Smitty—right in here!” Eddie was thin as a rail but he was always dancing around on his game leg. He used a chair for a crutch. Al used to laugh to himself when he heard Eddie humping along; he had guts, all right.

Eddie was the guy who had his leg in an old cast and used to hang it down in front of Al’s nose, just because it smelled so terrible. Al would give it a punch and say, “If I had a rotten leg like that I’d break it off and throw it in the ocean.”

The other Marine patients helped Al get around the ship; they would start him on the ladder so he could go topside and lie on the deck, sniffing in some of the salt breeze. They were always talking about going home. They would lie up there in the evening, when the sun was going down, and sing “California, Here I Come” at the top of their lungs.

Al knew he was really going back now, and he was

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happy about it, but a lot of times he felt depressed and blue. He would lie down in the hold at night, with the big engines throbbing under him, and wonder if he would ever see again.

He always felt worse at night. He had dreams about the island: the shellings, and bombings, and the Jap general jabbering away over on the other side of the river—and Johnny, lying there on the ground . . . He would wake up in a sweat and wouldn't be able to sleep for the rest of the night.

The ship took a long time coming home but one day they said, "We're in!" and all the Marines who could walk went up to get a look at the U.S.A. Al went up with them. They told Al they were going to take him off on a stretcher because his feet were so bad again, but he said, "The hell you will—you carried me on a stretcher too many times." They argued about it and Al got stubborn. Finally they let him dress and stagger along with the other guys. His feet were giving him hell.

Doc Ward, his "Little Butcher," was standing there by the rail when the ship got in. He came up to Al and got hold of his hand and said, "Smitty, you're a sonova gun, but boy, let me tell you something—" and then his voice choked up, but he said, "We had a lot of fun out there, you cussing me out and me batting you over the head and all that, but you've got something, you've got a sense of humor, and a personality that will help you a

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lot . . . ” Al felt all choked up himself. All he could say was, “Well, so long, Butcher, I’ll be seeing you again some time,” and then he started down the gangplank, with one of the fellows holding his arm.

He was one of the first to go off. There was a whole gang of Marines lined up there behind him at the rail. Somebody said, “There’s Smitty,” and they all began hollering, “Attaboy, Smitty!”

Al felt his sore foot touch the ground; he leaned down and patted the concrete floor of the pier, and then he turned around, and called back, “Step lightly, boys—it’s Heaven down here!”

CHAPTER SEVEN

Home

THE FIRST thing Ruth heard after Al's farewell letter in June was a post card from the government dated July 6. It was just a formal notice: Albert A. Schmid, Marine Corps Unit No. 690, arrived safely at his destination. Much later she got another card that Al had filled out in pencil before he left. It advised her to send his letters to the postmaster in San Francisco.

A long time went by after that: days and weeks of waiting. In August Ruth read about the Marine landing on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands, and wondered if Al was there. She began making a scrapbook with the letters he had sent from camp, and clippings and maps of the Pacific fighting.

In September she got two skimpy V-mail letters from Al; they just said he was feeling okay and couldn't tell her anything. He had written them with the stump of a pencil lying out on the beach on the island.

Late in September Ruth got a letter from somewhere in the Pacific Ocean, dated August 26. The writing was strange; the envelope was charred around the edges as though it had been in a fire or something. It was the letter Al had asked a sailor to write for him on the hospital ship.



Life Photo by Alfred Eisenstaedt

Al has a beer with some friends in Carl Henninger's taproom.



Al receives the Navy Cross.

Life Photo by Karl W. Ruess



Life Photo by Alfred Eisenstaedt

Al and Ruth leaving the Philadelphia Naval Hospital on a sunny morning in early spring.

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"Dear Ruth," it began, "I don't know how to start this letter as I am not very good at writing. Al asked me to write this letter for him as he has been wounded in battle. I am a sailor and am taking care of him, he is all right and I wouldn't worry about him.

"I will tell you honestly and truly tho, he is a HERO and I do mean HERO . . .

"The battle goes this way, the dirty Japs tried to cross a river in forces outnumbering our forces. Al was on a machine gun and he held his fire until he could see the slant in their eyes, then he opened fire on them and mowed them down, so many Japs they were piled four feet deep.

"He said he will be coming home soon one of these days and he hoped to see you real soon . . . " And then, still in the strange handwriting, "Lots of love, Al Schmid."

There was no place given—the censor had cut it out. Ruth kept on writing in care of the postmaster in San Francisco. She tried not to let her letters show how desperate she felt. Another month went by before she got more news: on October 23 a neat, typewritten note arrived, with a small Red Cross at the top. It said Al had just been admitted to the Naval Hospital at San Diego, California; that he could not write her at the present time, but he sent his love and hoped she would write to him very soon. Next day came a post card with a picture of the hospital on the front and Al's name on the back—"Pvt. A. A. Schmid, Bldg. 2, Deck 1, U. S. Naval Hospital, San Diego."

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It was in a new handwriting, round and flowing, in blue ink. It read: "Dear Ruthie—Glad to hear from you—in more ways than you'll ever know. The nurses here are okay—even the blonde ones. But I'll take a girl named Ruth every time. Love, Chubby . . . "

The next letter was in the same handwriting, and it was signed by Miss Virginia Pfeiffer, a Red Cross worker at the hospital. She had been talking with Al, she wrote, and he had been wondering for a long time if he should tell Ruth what was wrong with him.

"Today he told me he might as well let you know," Miss Pfeiffer wrote. "He has lost one eye and the other is seriously damaged. The doctors will not know for months whether he will have any sight in that eye . . . Of course Al is primarily concerned with what this news will mean so far as you and he are concerned. If you stand by him until he comes home it will mean a lot to him and if you can both pull together it will mean everything. He thinks you are such a wonderful girl . . . "

"I see him for a while each day to read him his mail and try to encourage him. Your letters and cards mean a lot to him and I enjoy reading them aloud to him . . . He's quite a boy, as you already know . . . "

Ruth got to a telephone and put in a long-distance call for Al but they couldn't connect her at the hospital. She sent him an air-mail special-delivery letter saying she wanted to come to San Diego right away. She said she

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didn't care what had happened; she loved him, and would always stand by him. She wrote that she had been wearing his ring ever since she got it, and was proud every time she looked at it. She told him funny stories about the people at home, and said she had been around to visit his grandmother.

And she warned him he had better hurry back home. She had been going dancing at the U.S.O. Club quite a bit, and had met some nice soldiers there . . .

A letter from Al himself was her reward. It was in a new kind of handwriting—he had dictated it to one of his buddies in bed. He was still trying to tell her what had happened to him: "I suppose you don't know what is wrong with me," the letter read, "but I guess I might as well tell you. I was in a machine-gun nest and a hand grenade hit us both (me and the gun). I was hit in the thumb, shoulder and eyes. At the present I can't see but the doctors are doing all they can to help me.

"I still have the picture you gave me, and I carry it with me all the time . . . I am glad you liked the ring.

"I am feeling much better today and the doctor told me I could get up for a little while tomorrow. As soon as I can I am going to put in for a transfer to the East Coast . . .

"I hope you don't go to the Army boarding house over twice a week, by the Army boarding house I mean the U.S.O. They must have put in a U.S.O. at Guadalcanal, because the Army has moved in there now . . .

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"It rained here the other day and it brought back old memories.

"Well, I guess that is all for now. I hope you will write again as soon as you can. From the devil himself,
Al."

Ruth felt good when she read that letter. It sounded like the old Al.

A few days later she got a letter that did not make her feel good. It was from Miss Pfeiffer, and it said Al definitely did not want her to come to California now—"Not that he loves you any the less, my dear, but because he loves you more, and fears he will hurt you in some way. For some reason he thinks he looks so badly, but he doesn't, I assure you . . . "

Al was thinking of a transfer to the Chicago hospital to be near his brother, the letter said—passing quickly over the inference that he would rather be there than in the East, where Ruth was. The last paragraph really hurt: "Perhaps it would be wise for you not to write him every day—for a while. Now he thinks people are being too nice to him, and I should like to see his reaction when he doesn't hear from you every day."

Ruth got a little angry, and decidedly tearful, when she read that. She wondered if that was the way Al felt—he didn't sound like it in *his* letter. It was hard to know how Al felt, there were so many people writing for him—so many people, and so many miles, between them . . .

Anyway, she obeyed instructions. She stopped writing.

In ten days Miss Pfeiffer called off the experiment. "I see you've done as I suggested," she wrote, on November 13. "As a result I think Al is getting a bit lonesome and neglected by one girl even tho he's been getting fan mail enough to satisfy the heart of half a dozen leathernecks . . ."

Ruth began writing again as though nothing had happened; as though ten days of not writing to Al was the most natural thing in the world. She told him more funny stories, laughed with him, kidded him along. What did he want to go to Chicago for, she asked—was he trying to get rid of her? Was there another girl mixed up in this—a nurse, maybe, or a WAAC? Or had Al found his dream girl on one of those South Sea islands, and couldn't wait till he got back there!

And always she kept telling him, It doesn't matter what's happened, I love you, I'll stand by you . . .

Miss Pfeiffer thanked her for Al; Ruth's letters were a big help, she said; she knew now that Al really needed them. On November 20 she wrote: "Guess who brought your chatty letter up to me? None other than Al . . . He got quite a kick out of bringing the letter up to my office (you see all the Red Cross is in a separate building). I read the 'newsy' parts to him so he knows you still love him . . .

"He also had some shrapnel fragments dug out of his face and ear so he's quite handsome."

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A week later came a typewritten letter from Al himself, dictated, he explained, to a stenographer in Hollywood. He had made a flying trip up there to appear on a March of Time broadcast. He had been meeting a lot of important people—Paul Whiteman, Gene Krupa, Bette Davis, Red Skelton—"so many celebrities I can't remember them all." He had dinner at the Brown Derby; a drink with Eddie Cantor. Dinah Shore sang him a song and Bing Crosby, his favorite crooner, chatted with him for half an hour: "He's certainly a great guy," Al wrote, "very natural and the same easygoing manner he has on the air and in pictures . . .

"I'm feeling very well," he added. "Write when you can . . ."

Ruth began to think about Christmas shopping. She bought Al a new billfold—Miss Pfeiffer had mentioned he could use one—and fixed up a box of surprises for him: candy, toy soldiers, a little wooden railroad train.

And then, one day in December, the bottom fell out of everything. It was a letter from Miss Pfeiffer again.

"Dear Ruthie," it began, "This is going to be a difficult letter for me to write for it's slightly (?) full of bad news for you. First, Smitty's foot is acting up again, so he isn't able to leave now. Secondly, he wants me to tell you he can't and won't marry you so long as he is unable to see . . .

"Al had bad news Monday. The doctors told him (another specialist was here) that it would be a year before

they could do anything to his eye. So that's the source of Al's feeling so badly . . . I feel much the same as you—about still wanting to marry the man I loved in spite of a physical handicap, but you see men like Al feel they would be a burden and not able to give you all the things they had hoped to have for you some day . . .

“Al will never marry anyone but you so if and when he regains the sight in his eye, I'm hoping things will work out for you two. Al has to live his own life tho, and probably he will make no decisions until he has the final verdict on his eye . . . ”

A couple of days after that the mailman left a bundle at Ruth's house: all the letters she had written Al for the last two weeks. They had been returned from San Diego, unopened, with no explanation.

Somehow Ruth got on a train that afternoon for Quantico, Virginia. Before it even stopped she was in her sister's arms, sobbing.

For Al, lying on a cot in California, three thousand miles away, everything was enormously complicated. It was complicated by the empty socket where his left eye had been, and by his right eye which couldn't see, and by his leg and feet, which were still so swollen and infected he could walk only a few steps a week. On the ship coming back all his thoughts and feelings had been centered on the idea of getting home. Now he was home, and he seemed to be as bad off as ever—maybe worse.

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He had to learn how to do everything without seeing—how to button his clothes, and light a cigarette, and go to the “head”; how to eat chow without knocking the meat off the plate, or spilling gravy down his chin. He tried to imagine how he looked with that empty eye socket, and it wasn’t pleasant. Some well-intentioned people offered to teach him Braille, and brought in records of books that were supplied by the State Agency for the Blind.

He told the nurses he didn’t want any of that stuff; they could go to hell.

Somebody sent him a small radio of his own, and that was a real help. He kept it on twenty-four hours a day, tuned down low, beside his bed. He listened to the football games and the musical shows and the milkmen’s programs they had at five and six in the morning. He liked the big comedians best of all, though—Bob Hope, and Red Skelton, and Bob Burns, anybody who could make him laugh. He still laughed.

One Saturday in November Kay Kyser came down to the hospital to entertain the boys. They put Al up in front, in a wheelchair, where he could catch onto everything. The Old Professor was pretty funny: the big moment came when he saw one of the nurses fussing around trying to adjust the girdle under her white uniform. He called out to her, “Hey, you know those things are just like the Japs—they sneak up on you from behind and it takes a good ‘yank’ to pull ’em down.” Al thought he

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would just about die laughing after they explained the joke to him.

He got a big kick out of Ruth's letters but somehow he couldn't bear the idea of her seeing him, just yet. He always used to think, back on the island, if he ever did come home he would go to Ruth and ask her to marry him. Now he thought: What's the use, I can't get married—I'll never make enough money to keep her. He thought of how he had worked, and earned his own money ever since he was 15 years old; he had just got things right, the way he wanted them, when the war came. Then he sold his car, and gave away some of the other stuff; he didn't have anything left but some guns he couldn't shoot and a half interest in an old skunk dog. He had some friends, back there in Philadelphia, and his brother, but if he was going to be blind he would just be a drag on them—he didn't want that. He didn't want to be a drag on Ruth for the rest of her life.

He couldn't write those things himself but he tried to explain to Miss Pfeiffer, the Red Cross girl, so she could tell Ruth. That was about the best he could do . . .

One day in November a fellow came running up to Al's bed, all out of breath—Al could hear him puffing and panting. He said, "Are you Smitty? Are you the guy they call Machine Gun Smitty?" Al said, "That's me, what about it?" The guy was all excited; he said, "Are you the guy that killed two hundred Japs on Guadalcanal?"

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Al said, "I never counted 'em, but that's what they tell me." The visitor explained he was a Marine Corps correspondent and wanted to do a write-up about Al; he had talked to some of the other Marines in the hospital and got some dope from them, and now he had to get Al's story. Al didn't want to talk about it, but they brought him a written permission from an officer, so he told the guy what had happened that night in the nest.

Lee Diamond was there in the hospital, getting over the bullet wound in his arm; he had been hit pretty hard. He came around and posed for a photograph sitting beside Al's bed, with Al's hand on his shoulder.

That was how the first story about Al came out in the papers, on November 11, 1942.

After that Al got so much fan mail that even the helpful Miss Pfeiffer couldn't keep track of it—twenty-five, thirty-five, sometimes fifty letters a day. She read Al all he could listen to, and tried to answer some of them for him. He told her to save Ruth's letters till the last every day; they were the best, and he wanted to hear them last. But sometimes after he got through listening for hours to the things people wrote him he was too tired and mixed up to hear what Ruth was writing.

Just trying to keep up with all that mail in the hospital made life a lot more complicated.

One morning Al said to the nurse, "That's a window over there, isn't it?" and they knew he was beginning to

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see. He got so he could tell the difference between day and night, even inside the hospital. He could tell where there was a bright electric light burning: it looked to him like a locomotive headlight coming toward him, way off in the distance in a fog.

The doctors said that was fine. They told Al there were still tiny pieces of shrapnel in his right eye that would have to work themselves out; they were too small to remove by surgery. The concussion hemorrhages in back of the eyeball were very slow in clearing up. But they thought he could expect further "improvement." They gave him a new glass eye, which made him more self-conscious than ever. The boys said it didn't match up at all—they said, "Where'd you get that? It looks like it came out of a dead man." Al laughed a little but he was always nervous about the damn thing.

His leg was improving slowly and he made occasional trips to town with the other walking cases from the hospital. They got pretty plastered when they went out, but the people at the hospital seemed to understand; nobody could blame them. Sometimes it seemed as though the best thing to do was get drunk as hell—at least it proved you were alive instead of dead. Al drank thirty straight shots of whisky in one place one night, and walked out on his own legs—that was the record. One time he and five other fellows spent two hundred dollars between them in a single joint; one guy alone spent more than sixty dollars. They were a bunged-up crew, all right: Al

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used to go out with three sailors, and between the four of them they had five “good” eyes, including the one Al had left. There was a sailor in Al’s ward who got in a fight in a saloon one time—before he started he said, “Wait a minute”; he took out his glass eye and wrapped it in a handkerchief, and then pitched in and beat hell out of the other guy. They were always taking their eyes out at a bar somewhere, and dipping them in a glass of whisky, just to shock somebody. They didn’t give a damn what they did.

Al got a shock a couple of weeks before Christmas when he heard from his brother that Ruth’s letters had been sent back from the hospital, all sealed up. He couldn’t figure it out; it was all a mistake. He told the Red Cross girl to write right away and say it was a mistake. Maybe they had got mixed up somehow in all the fan mail he was getting from people; he didn’t try to listen to all the letters. But he always carried his mail to Miss Pfeiffer, and she would have told him if there were letters from Ruth.

It was too much for him.

Then he got a sizzling note from Ruth’s sister, Mercedes, who was married to a Marine gunnery sergeant herself, and didn’t hesitate to speak her mind. She wanted to know if he was trying to break Ruth’s heart, sending the kind of letters he did, and not even reading hers. She told him a few things. She said, “When a girl really

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loves a fellow, she can't just walk out of his life like that . . . ”

Again Al tried to explain: it was all a mistake about the letters.

He told Miss Pfeiffer to go out and buy some Christmas presents, to get something for Mercedes' little girl, a teddy bear or something. He told her to send cards home to everybody. He had presents for Ruth already—the bracelet he had bought on the other side, after he was hurt, and a silver pin from New Zealand, with the letters N. Z. on the back. He gave the Red Cross girl some money and told her to get Ruth something else, something she could wear. She brought back a cute little pink housecoat, the stubby kind, with puffy quilted sleeves. They worked together for several days wrapping up the stuff and getting it mailed.

Ruth's cheerful letters began flowing again, as though nothing serious had happened. Al sent her a message: he was leaving San Diego after Christmas, and would come to the Naval Hospital in Philadelphia for further treatment.

It was quite a Christmas, with plenty of parties before and after, and a funny incident that happened to Al in the hospital. He was lying in bed the day before Christmas, feeling pretty good, joking with the other guys, when a bunch of Sunday-school kids came in to sing carols for them. Al had just said to somebody, “I guess I'm going

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wacky—I'm getting bells in my belfry!" when the kids cut loose with "Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way . . . " It was such a coincidence that Al and the guys around him busted out laughing and just howled; the poor kids didn't know what to make of it. They must have thought their singing wasn't much appreciated.

But the best thing happened at Miss Pfeiffer's house, on Christmas night. Al and a couple of other boys from the hospital went there for dinner, and afterward they were sitting around, shooting the breeze and enjoying themselves. Al got to studying the colored lights on the Christmas tree, and after a while he pointed to one and said, "I guess that's a green one, isn't it?" It was.

Al came home on the nineteenth of January, just a little over a year from the day he left to become a Marine. He stepped off the train at North Philadelphia, looking husky and erect, with a Navy corpsman holding his arm. His green Marine cap was tilted back on his head at the old jaunty angle. You could hardly tell he had ever been hurt—there was just a little L-shaped scar under his left eye, and a bandage on his thumb. He laughed when he felt Ruth's hat pressing against him, and her arms over his shoulders.

He laughed again when a reporter asked him, "Are you going to invite us to the wedding?"

"Sure, you bet," he said.

Ruth got in the ambulance and rode to the hospital

with him. Al tried to explain again about the letters, but Ruth said never mind, that could wait till some other time.

For several weeks after that the doctors kept a close watch on Al, studying his eye and clearing up the last bad shrapnel wound, the one that gouged off part of his left thumb. Ruth came down to the hospital during visiting hours—on Wednesday evenings after work, and Saturday afternoons. Other days she talked to Al on the phone, and wrote him long letters which she had to carry down and read herself; he said he couldn't give them to anybody to read, because he never knew what she was going to say to embarrass him. One time she brought him an *Esquire* calendar she saw on a newsstand; they both got a good laugh out of the way Al studied the pictures of the pretty girls. "You can see them, all right!" Ruth told him, and Al grinned, and said, "Just let me get my hands on a couple of 'em . . ."

Al got along swell in the Philadelphia hospital. He dressed himself and walked around the ward, feeling his way by the ends of the beds. He went up and down stairs with the other fellows kind of steering him along, to get coffee in the canteen. They kidded around a lot; one night when Al came back from getting a drink of water he found all the sheets on his bed tied in hard knots, so he had a hell of a time getting in; they had "short-sheeted" him. He kept his little radio going almost all the time and shaved himself in the morning with a new

Schick electric razor the boys at Dodge Steel sent him for Christmas. It worked fine except when a little piece of shrapnel worked out of Al's face and got caught in the blade.

One good thing was a new glass eye they got for Al from a store on Chestnut Street where they were supposed to make the best glass eyes in America. Al sat there a couple of hours while the man fussed around with his tools and brushes and matched up the "good" one. The new eye was a beauty, everybody told Al. They could look right at him and never know which was the phony and which was the real eye.

One Saturday the doctors gave Al liberty for a week end without medical supervision, and he arranged to have a friend of his, John Doerr, pick him up and take him out to the Dodge Steel plant. Some of the boys from there had been down to see him at the hospital on off hours; they weren't able to get in, and Al thought he would go out and return the call.

It was kind of a wet, raw day. While they were driving along Al kept smoking and talking about all kinds of things. He poked his face out the side window of the car and felt the drizzle and said, "It's a good gunning day—the pheasants wouldn't get up fast." Once while they were going up Broad Street he suddenly said, "Wasn't that a Yellow Cab that just passed us?" John said it was and Al said, "I can see it's yellow, but I can't tell it's a cab."

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"It's way up ahead, Al," John told him. "It's foggy and the windshield is all steamed up." He leaned over and rubbed off Al's window with his hand.

"If I had my old gunning breeches on now, and boots, and hunting coat, it would be all right," Al said.

"You and me both," John told him. "But we haven't been doing much gunning lately. We don't want to use the gas."

"Sure, that's right," Al said. "Anything like that is all right. The boys over there need all the help they can get."

After a while he said, "My nerves are pretty well shot, but they'll calm down. I'll get settled after a bit." And then he said, "As soon as you see your friends you feel a hundred per cent better. I don't even have to see 'em—I can tell 'em by their voices."

They got to the plant as the two o'clock shift was coming off. Al walked around the shop for a while, saying "Hello," and talking to the fellows. He kept saying, "Well, I just came up so you could get a look at me!" His voice was trembling a little, and he was swallowing hard. He shook hands with Larry, his old boss. Somebody said, "Say hello to Jake," and Al turned his face up to the overhead crane operator, and said, "Hello, Jake!" When he came to the drafting room, one of the men who was there working in shirt sleeves got up from his desk, and took Al's hand, and said, "That was a great job you did out there."

"It's what I went out to do," Al said, and his voice

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was so low, he had to repeat it—"It's what I went out to do."

Jim Merchant was waiting around to take him home, and they had lunch there in the kitchen—Ella Mae's vegetable soup and sandwiches. Later on they dropped up to Carl's for a few beers. Al laughed and kept clearing his throat—"Br—Br—"—before each drink. When somebody offered him a beer he would say, "Well, I might force one." Carl told him he had fifty beers coming from playing the pin-ball machine before Pearl Harbor and Al said he guessed he would be around to collect them some time.

Somebody drove him over to Ruth's house then, and he had supper, and sat around shooting the breeze with the people there, the same as always. He didn't have any trouble finding his way around the house, once he had been there a while. Outdoors, in bright sunlight, he could even see where the porch steps were, although he couldn't count them. Sunday morning Ruth got up and fixed eggs and coffee for just the two of them in the kitchen. One of his eggs had a double yolk and Al said, "I just want two eggs," and Ruth told him, "I only gave you two eggs," and Al said, "You gave me three—don't you think I can see?" They both had a good laugh over the double-yolked egg.

Uncle Howard drove them out in the country in his car in the afternoon to see Sonny Walters and Clarence and Jeff and some other people. Al got hold of some of

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the old guns they used to go hunting with and started taking them apart and fussing with them—he couldn't let them alone. When they got back to the house some more people dropped in, people they both knew. It was a big week end. When Monday morning came Al didn't feel like going back to the hospital.

One day at the hospital they called Al up and said he should get ready to come uptown and meet General Vandegrift, the Marine commander on Guadalcanal. Al and some of the other fellows who were wounded on the island got dressed and brushed and cleaned their shoes and rode up in a Marine station wagon to the Historical Society, where the general was attending some kind of celebration. Some of the boys had crutches or slings; others just looked pale, or limped a little. Al was the only one who couldn't see. They all sat in the front row there while the general made a speech and afterward they each shook hands with him and talked to him. The general and Al got to be pretty friendly; they sat in a corner, shooting the breeze, for quite a while, and when the general had to go, he said he had enjoyed himself very much. Al said he had too, and he thought they ought to get together more often.

A few days later word came from Washington that Al was to receive the Navy Cross, which is the highest decoration the Navy Department gives for bravery. Al went over to the Navy Yard on March 11 and Colonel

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Randall pinned the bronze cross, with its blue and white ribbon, on his chest, and gave him a citation from President Roosevelt which read: "For extraordinary heroism and outstanding courage in action against enemy Japanese forces at Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, August 21, 1942."

Lee Diamond and Johnny Rivers also received the Navy Cross. Lee got his in San Diego and Johnny's was sent to his foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Elwood Horne, of Quakertown.

On top of all this came another dispatch from Washington announcing that Al had been promoted to corporal. He had wanted that badly; he figured he could use the extra money now. He thought of the lieutenant, back there on the island, and laughed: he was getting the chicken scratches anyway!

A trip to New Orleans with Ruth was the next thing. The Navy Mothers Club invited them down for a celebration they were having, and the Marines arranged for them to go. When they got there the mayor turned out and gave them the key to the city; all kinds of important people rushed around making them comfortable; the newspapers photographed them having breakfast in the St. Charles Hotel. Al went to a big rally and sold war bonds, and shook hands with workers in a shipyard. They had dinner at Antoine's, with oysters Rockefeller, and fish baked in a paper bag, though ordinarily Al doesn't go for fish.

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Corporal Schmid was getting to be a celebrity himself!

Before he even got back to Philadelphia he wasn't a corporal any more; he was a sergeant. The promotion was announced in Washington and Ruth read it to Al out of the paper. There was a flood of invitations waiting for him—to go to Washington, to New York, to a score of places to sell war bonds, and speak on the radio. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* ran a long editorial complaining because Al's own home town had not honored him before New Orleans. The *Inquirer* announced it was going to give Al a solid gold medal and one thousand dollars in cash as a "Hero Award," and was going to have a city-wide parade and celebration to go with it.

But before that came off Al had something else on his mind. He spoke to Ruth and she said okay. The Marines at the Eastern Recruiting Division headquarters helped him arrange it—they reserved a room under a different name at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, and got a license without letting the newspapers hear about it. Ruth and Al and First Sergeant Max Slepín of the Marines drove up to City Hall in a cab, and met Uncle Howard and Ruth's sister Isabella, and they all went around to a judge's private chambers on the third floor. There were three judges waiting for them, all smiling and anxious to help. Ruth and Al felt pretty solemn about it; they stood there looking sort of tense and nervous until the judge came to the part where Al had to slip on the ring. Ruth

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put out her hand and Al took it and sort of fumbled around—the judge kept right on reading the marriage ceremony, and suddenly Al blurted out, “Wait a minute, Judge, I can’t get the damn thing on her finger!”

Then they all laughed and felt better.

